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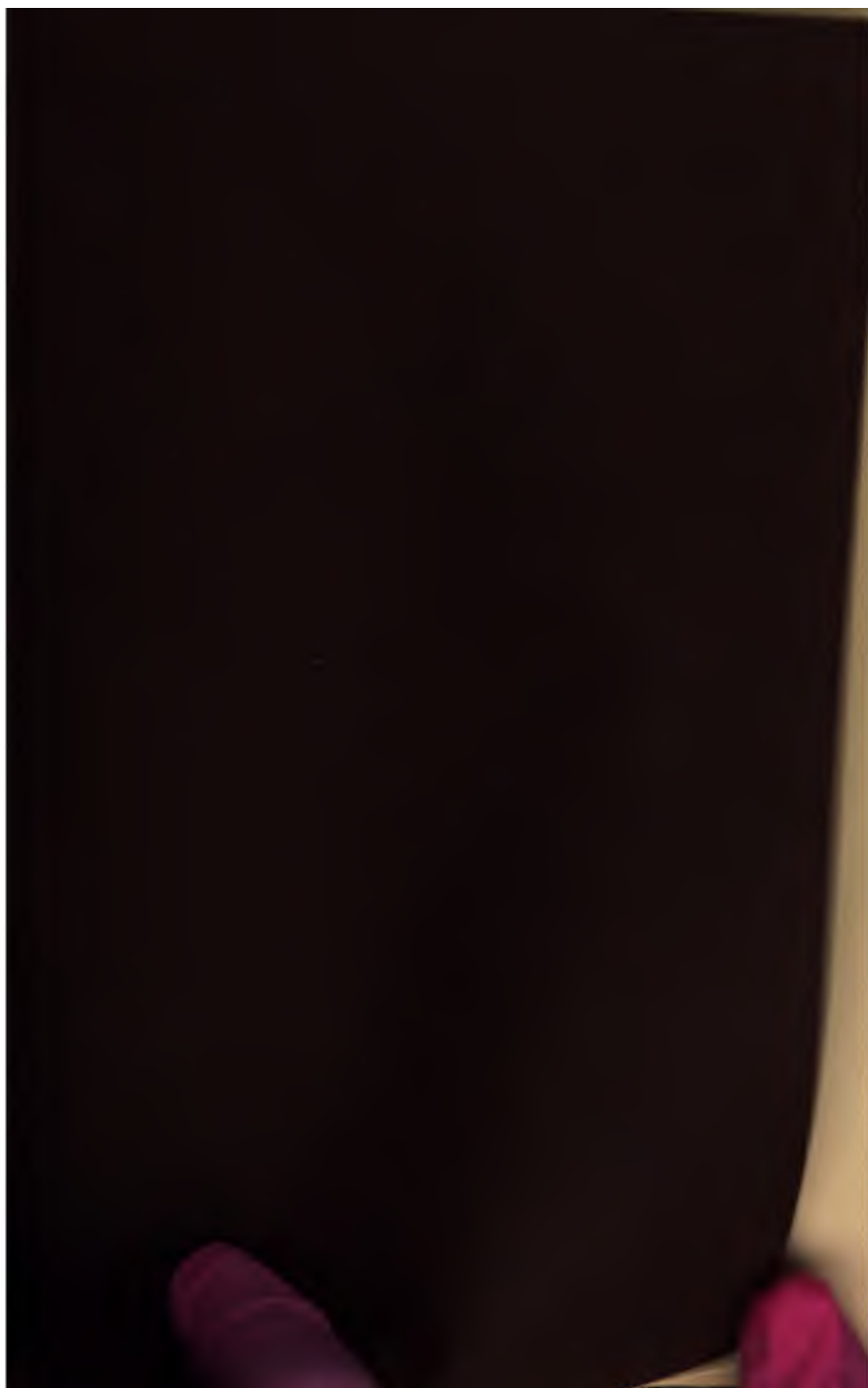
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THE END.

for the door at full speed, without a word.
Thor is close behind, but just too late to be
first in opening the door.
"Mamma! mamma!"
And Balder Helwyse springs up, and as she
enters with the rejoicing children at each hand,
he meets her with the thrilling smile which, in
this world, she will never see!

THE BLACK CLOUD.
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yellow beard. How they all laugh! and what a pleasant laugh has the stalwart, dark-eyed gentleman,—so deep-toned and yet so boyish! But presently all three pause to take breath.

"Thor," then says the gentleman, "whose portrait did I tell you that was?" and he points to an oil-painting hanging over the piano.

"Grandpapa MacGentle, papa!"

"What did he do for all of us?"

As Master Thor hesitates a moment, the little golden-haired lady breaks in;—"I know, papa! He made uth rich, and gave uth our houth, and he thaw me when I wath a wee, wee baby, and then he—he"—

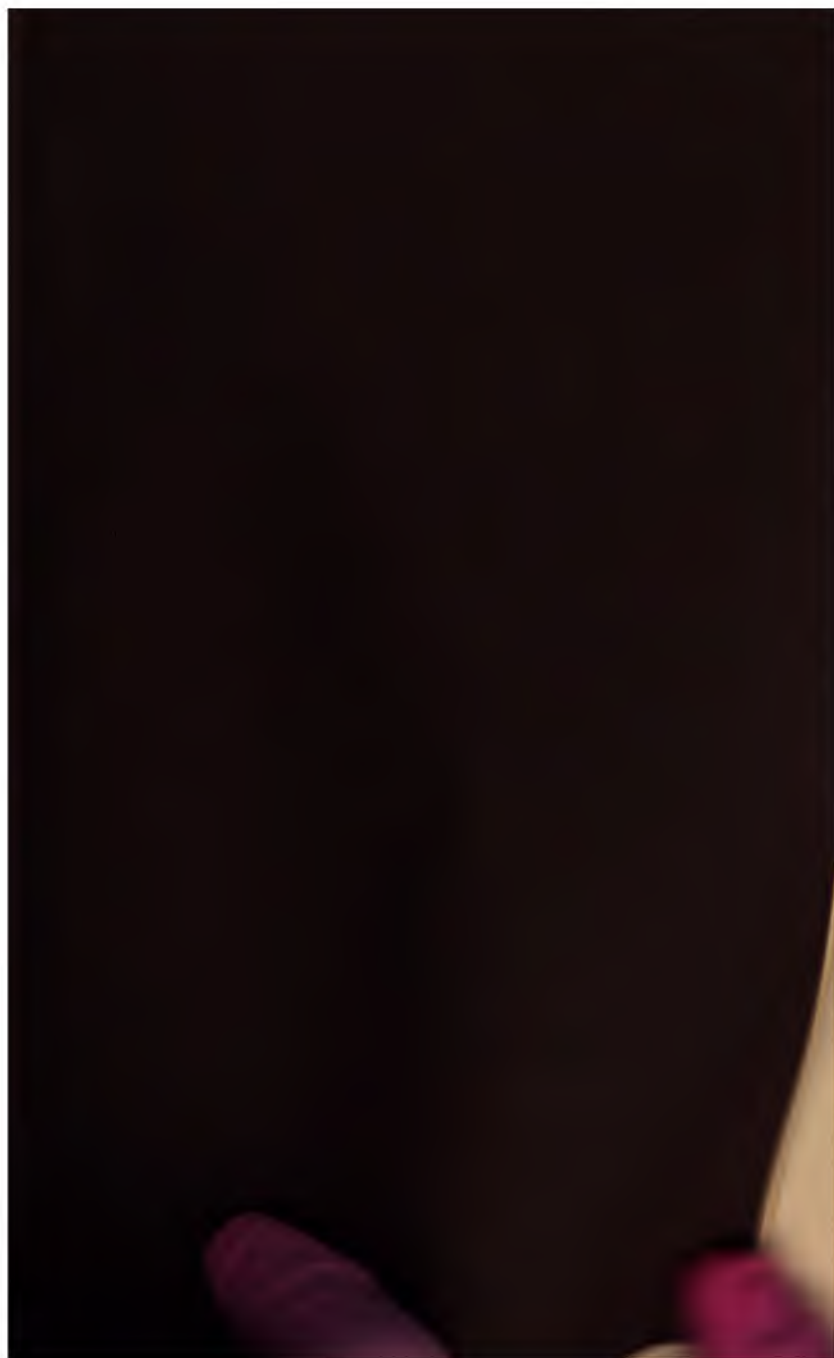
"He went to Heaven, papa!" says Thor, re-covering himself.

Hereupon there was a silence, because the two children, glancing up in their father's face, saw that it was grave and thoughtful.

But suddenly the little girl pricks up her small ears, and scrambles to the carpet, and sets off



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I D O L A T R Y.

XVIII.

THE HOOPOE AND THE CROCODILE.

“GNULEMAH!” she answered, laying her finger on the head of her golden serpent, and uttering the name as though it were of the only woman in the world.

The next moment she found time to realise that something unprecedented had occurred, and her wonder trembled on the verge of dismay.

“Speaks in my language!” exclaimed she, below her breath: “But is not Hiero!”

Until Balder’s arrival, then, Hiero would

'seem to have been the only talking animal she had known. The singularity of this did not at first strike the young man. Gnulemah was the arch-wonder; yet she so fully justified herself as to seem very nature; and by dint of her magic reality, what else had been wonderful seemed natural. Balder was in fairy-land.

He fell easily into the fairy-land humour. "I'm a being like yourself," said he, with a smile, "and not dumb like your plants and animals."

"Understood! answered!" exclaimed Gnulemah again, in a tremor. As morning spreads up the sky, did the sweet blood flow outwards tinting her face and neck. As the blush deepened, her eyelids fell, and she shielded her beautiful embarrassment with her raised hands. A pathos in the simple grace of this action drew tears unawares to Balder's eyes.

What was in her mind? What might she be? Had she always lived in this enchanted

spot companionless (for poor old Hiero would hardly serve her turn), and ignorant, perhaps, that the world held other beings endowed like herself with human gifts? Had she vainly sought throughout nature for some more intimate kinship than nature could yield her; and thus at length fancied herself a unique, independently-created soul, imperial over all things? Since her whole world was comprised between the river and the wall, no doubt she believed that the reality of things extended no further.

In Balder she had found a creature like—yet pleasingly unlike—herself; palpable to feeling as to sight, and gifted with the articulate utterance which till now she had accounted her peculiar faculty. Delightful might the discovery be, but awesome too—frightening her back by its very tendency to draw her forward.

Whether or not this were the solution of Gnulemah's mystery, Balder was not long in recognising quiet of address and manner to

be his cue. Probably he could not do better than at once to get the ear of Uncle Hiero, and establish himself upon a somewhat more conventional footing than the present one; and his next step, accordingly, was to ask after him by name.

She peeped between her fingers at the questioner, but ventured not quite to emerge from behind her screen as she answered—her primary effort at description.

“Hiero is—Hiero!”

“And how long have you been here?”

Gnulemah forgot her embarrassment in wondering how so remarkable a creature happened to ask questions whose answers the whole world, which she had just mentioned, knew! “We are always here!” she exclaimed; adding, after a moment’s doubtful scrutiny, “Are you a spirit?”

“An embodied spirit—yes!” answered Balder, smiling again.

"One of those that I see beyond"—she pointed in the direction of the cliff—"that move and seem to live? but they are only shadows in the great picture.—No; for I cannot touch them, nor talk with them. They never answer me. They are shadows." She paused, and seemed to struggle with her bewilderment.

"They are shadows!" repeated Helwyse to himself. Though no Hermetic philosopher, he was aware of a symbolic kind of truth in her fanciful dogma. The world outside of any man's immediate daily circle, is indeed a shadow to him; other men, until grasped by the hand, are no more than spirits. So to Gnulemah her garden wall was the limit of real existence; the "great picture" outside could be true for her only after she had gone forth and felt as well as seen it.

Fancy aside, however, was not hers a condition morally and mentally deplorable? Ex-

quisitely developed in body, must not her mind have grown rank with weeds, beautiful, perhaps, but useless?—Herein Balder fancied he could trace the one-sided influence of his crack-brained uncle. Whether his daughter or not, Gnulemah was evidently a victim to his insane passion for experiment. What particular crotchet could he have in view in this case? Was it an attempt to get back to the early sense of the human race?

The material for such an evolution was certainly of tempting excellence. In point of beauty and apparent natural capacity, Gnulemah might claim equality with the noblest daughter of the Pharaohs. The grand primary problem of how to isolate her from contact with the outside world, and experience of it, was, under the existing circumstances, easy of solution. Beyond this, there needed little positive treatment. Her creed must arise from her own instinctive and intuitive impressions. Of all

beyond the reach of her hands, she must trust to her eyes only for information; no marvel, therefore, if her conclusions concerning the great intangible phenomena of the universe were fantastic as the veriest heathen myths. The untrained self-evolved feelings and impulses of a black-eyed nymph like Gnulemah were not likely to be orthodox. There was much danger that she might be no better than a worshipper of vain delusions and of the idols of the imagination.

Her attire—a style of costume such as might have been the fashion in the days of Cheops or Tuthmosis—showed a carrying out of the Doctor's whim—a reproduction of the external to match the internal conditions of the age he aimed to reconstruct. The project seemed, upon the whole, to have been well-conceived and consistently prosecuted. It was seldom that Uncle Hiero achieved so consistent a piece of work; but it showed greater moral

obliquity than Balder would have looked for in that well-intentioned old gentleman.

And yet there was no depth of sincerity in the young man's strictures. There stood the woman Gnulemah before him—purple, white, and gold; a vivid, breathing, warm-hued life—soul and body rich with Oriental splendour. There she stood, her hair flowing dark and silky from beneath her twisted turban; her eyes—black melted loadstones;—the broad Egyptian pendants gleaming and glowing from temple to shoulder. The golden serpent seemed to writhe on her bosom, informed from its wearer with a subtile vitality. Through all dominated a grand repose like the calm of nature, which storms may move but not dethrone.

There she stood—enchanted princess, witch, goddess—woman at all events, palpable and undeniable! She must be taken for what she was—heathen or Christian, enlightened or darkened. She was a perfected achievement; vain

to argue how she might have been made better. Who says that an evening cloud, gorgeous in purple and heavenly gold, were more usefully employed fertilising a garden-patch?

Balder Helwyse, moreover, was not a simple utilitarian; he was almost ready to make a religion of beauty. If he blamed his uncle for having thus shut up this superb creature within herself, he did not, therefore, fail to admire the result of the imprisonment. He knew that he was looking upon as rare a spectacle as man's eyes were ever blessed withal; nor was he slow to perceive the psychological interest of the situation. To a student of mankind—if to no one else—Gnulemah was, beyond estimation, precious. When the path leads towards pleasant places, few are averse to justifying their choice of it upon sound scientific and business grounds; regarding these, probably, as more honourable and forcible than the secret heart-impulses which nevertheless not only give birth

to all others, but do the others' work into the bargain. But had Balder forgotten what fruit his tree of philosophy already yielded him ?

At all events, he forbore to press his question as to the whereabouts of Uncle Hiero, who would be sure to turn up sooner or later ; it was enough to know that he still existed. Meanwhile he would sound the sweet depths of this fresh nature undisturbed.

The hoopoe (who had played an important part in bringing on the acquaintance thus far) now forsook his perch above Balder's head, and after hovering in mid-air for a moment as if to select the best spot, he alighted upon a mossy cushion at the foot of the twin palm-trees. Such a couch might Adam and Eve have rejoiced to find in Paradise. Balder, taking the hint, without more ado threw himself down there ; while Gnulemah half knelt, half sat beside him, supported on her arm, her warm tapering fingers buried in the deep soft

moss. The little master-of-ceremonies remained with great propriety between the two, pruning and fluttering his bright feathers, and casting diamond glances sidelong.

“And so you remember nothing before coming to this place, Gnulemah?” asked her new acquaintance, looking up at her face.

“Only dream memories, that grow dimmer and dimmer. Before being born into this world, I was a spirit in the great shadow-picture beyond; and when my lamp goes out I may return thither.”

“Your lamp, Gnulemah? What lamp?”

“How can you talk to me and understand me, and yet not know all that I know? My lamp is the light of my life; it burns always in the temple yonder, and when it goes out my life will become a darkness; for I am Gnulemah, the daughter of fire!”

“I knew not that my uncle was so poetical,” thought Balder: “daughter of fire—yes! that

accounts for the heat-lightning in her eyes." Aloud, he said, in fanciful allusion to the manner of his descent over the wall,

"I came from the sky into your world, Gnulemah; though we can talk together, the things we know are different. Whatever we tell each other will be new!"

She caught the delightful idea of a life-time spent in instructing this wonderful being, and receiving instruction from him in return; it was a charming vista, and she entered it at once.

"Tell me," said she, bending a little forwards in her innocent earnestness, "are there others such as you in the place you come from? and do they look like Hiero, or like you—beautiful?"

Balder's heart warmed at this, and his cheeks flushed; it was a compliment from the very heart of nature. And although the splendid nymph's experience of men was avowedly most limited, her taste was unvitiated as her

sincerity, and her judgment may therefore have had more absolute value than the most practised fashionable belle's.

"Hiero and I are both men," was his modest answer; "and there are as many men where I come from as stars in the sky at night,—and as many women as men! Myriads of men and women, Gnulemah!"

She lifted her face and hand in eloquent astonishment. "Oh, what a world!" she cried, in her low-voiced way. "But are the women all like me?"

"There is not one like you, I think," answered he, with the quiet emphasis of conviction. How refreshing thus to set aside conventionalism! Her ingenuousness brought forth the like from him. "Have you never wished to go out beyond your wall?" he asked her.

"Yes, often," she said, fingering the golden serpent thoughtfully. "But that could not be, unless I put out the lamp. Sometimes I have

thought I would do it, for I am tired of this world,—it has changed so much since the first.”

“Is it less beautiful?”

“It is smaller than it used to be,” replied Gnulemah pensively. “Once the house was so high it touched heaven! see how it has dwindled now! And so it is with all other things—that are on the earth. But the clouds, and the sun and stars, are as large, and high, and beautiful as ever.”

“That is a consolation, is it not?” murmured Balder, between a smile and a sigh. Gnulemah was not the first to charge upon the world the alterations of the individual; nor the first, either, to find comfort in the constancy of heaven!

She went on, won to further confidence by her listener’s sympathy. “Once I hoped the wall would one day become so low that I might pass over it; but by and by it stopped changing, and still it is far too high. Shall I ever see the other side?”

"It can be broken down if need be; but you might go far before finding a world so fair as this. Perhaps it would be better to stand on the cliff, and only look forth across the river."

"I cannot stay always here," returned Gnulemah, shaking her turbaned head, with its gleaming bandeau and rattling pendants. "But no wall is between me and the sky. The flame of my lamp goes upward—why should not I?"

"A friend is the only world one does not tire of," he said, after a pause. "You have had no companions."

But Gnulemah glanced down at the hoopoe, who forthwith warbled aloud, and fluttered up to her shoulder. The birds were her companions, and so likewise were the plants and flowers; she could talk with them in their own language. Nature was Gnulemah's confidential friend, and intimately communed with her.

All this she conveyed to Balder, not by words, but by some subtle expression of eyes

and gestures. She could indeed give voiceless utterances in a manner pregnant and felicitous almost beyond belief.

"I meet also a beautiful maiden in the looking-glass," she added; "her face and motion are always the same as my own, but though she seems to speak, her voice never reaches me. She smiles, but only when I smile, and mourns only when I mourn. We can never reach each other, yet there is more beauty in her than in my birds and flowers.

"She is the shadow of yourself—no reality, Gnulemah."

"Are we shadows of each other? Is she tired of her world as I of mine? Shall we both escape to some other, or only pass each into the other's, and be separated as we are now?"

Balder, like many wise men before him, was at some loss how to bring his wisdom to bear in answering such unheard-of questions.

He could not explain the laws of optics in a sentence. Fortunately, Gnulemah, who had not yet learned to appeal confidently from her own to another's judgment, seemed scarcely to expect a solution to problems upon which she had possibly expended much private thought.

"I have learned to look on her as if she were myself, and she tells me secrets that no one else knows. I can see changes on her face which I can feel also in my own heart. She can teach me things I do not want to learn, but they are always true."

"Does she teach you that you grow every day more beautiful?" demanded Balder. He was willing to prove whether Gnulemah could be disconcerted. Many women had he known surprisingly innocent—until a chance word or action betrayed their profound depth.

"Our beauty is like the garden, that is beautiful every day, though no day is just like another. But the changes I meant are in the

spirit which looks back at me from her eyes, when I go deeply into them."

What connection could, after all, subsist between beauty and vanity in one who had neither rivals nor aught to rival for? Doubtless she enjoyed her beauty,—the more as her taste was pure of conventional falsities. How much of worldly experience would it take to vitiate that integrity in her? Would it not be better to leave her to end her life restricted to the same innocent and lovely companionship that had been hers thus far?—But here the hoopoe, startled at some movement that Balder made, abandoned his perch on his mistress's shoulder and flew to the top of the palm tree. Had the day when such friends could suffice her needs gone by!

Yes, it was now too late. No one who has beheld the sun can thenceforth dispense with it. Balder had shone athwart the beautiful recluse's path, and linked her to outside reali-

ties by a chain which, whether he went or stayed, would never break. Flowers, birds, shadows in the glass—worse than nothing would these things be to her from this hour on.

Heretofore the intercourse between the two had been tentative and incoherent—a doubtful aimless grappling with strange conditions which seemed delightful, but might mark unknown dangers. No solid basis of mutual acquaintance had been even approached. Balder, well used though he was to woman's society, knew not how to apply his experience here. Gnulemah had perhaps not yet decided whether her visitor were natural or supernatural. Of the two the man was probably the less at ease, finding himself in a pass over which tradition nor culture could guide him; while the woman, accustomed to daily communion with things mysterious to her understanding, would scarcely have altered her demeanour had Balder actually turned out a ghost or genie.

But the first step towards fixing the final relations between them was even then taking. The young man's abrupt movement in raising his hand to his face (probably with purpose to stroke the beard which no longer grew there) had not only frightened away the hoopoe, but had flashed upon Gnulemah a ray from the diamond ring. She rose to her feet suddenly and easily as a startled serpent rears erect its body. Some vivid emotion lightened in her face. Balder knew not what to make of the look she gleamed at him.

"What are you?" she asked, her voice sunk to almost a whisper. "Hiero?—are you Hiero?"

Balder stared confounded.

"Come back!—transfigured!" she went on, her eyes deepening with awe.

What did it mean? Balder, somewhat disturbed, got also on his feet, but as he did so Gnulemah crouched before him, holding out

her hands like a suppliant. An onlooker might have fancied that the would-be God had found his worshipper at last.

"My name is Balder," the deity made shift to say. As he spoke, the sun rounded the corner of the house and fell brightly over him, Gnulemah kneeling in shadow. The glory of his splendid youth seemed to have shone forth from within him in sudden effulgence.

"Balder!" she slowly repeated, still gazing up at him.

"There is a relationship between us," said he, a vague uneasiness urging him to take refuge behind a quaint fantasy. "You are the daughter of fire, and I the descendant of the sun. Balder is the sun-god!" He spoke the unpremeditated notion which the burst of sunlight had created in his brain—spoke not seriously, nor yet lightly. He had as much right to his parentage as she to hers.

But what a strange effect his words wrought upon her!

She clasped her hands together quickly in a kind of ecstasy. "The sun!—Balder! I have prayed to him! He has come to me—Balder, my God!"

With how divine an accent did her full low voice give him the name to which he had dared aspire! He was God—and her God!

He perhaps understood one part of the process through which her mind must have gone, but he could not find a word to answer, either of acceptance or disclaimer. He grew pale—his heart sick. Had the recognition of his deityhood been too tardy? Gnulemah thought he repulsed her, and her passion began to kindle—only religious passion, but hot enough to sear him.

"Do not be cold to me, Balder!"—his name, uttered as she uttered it, strangely moved him as a fearful blasphemy;—"In my lonely kneel-

ings I have felt you! My eyes close, my hands grow together, my breath flutters—every breath draws in trembling joy and fear! I think ‘He is with me—the Being whom I adore!’ But when I opened my eyes, He was gone—Balder!”.

Still motionless, and apparently deaf, did the divine mortal stand, bathed in mocking sunlight. He was powerless to stop her from unveiling to him, as to the visible God, the most sacred places of her maiden heart. That sublime office, whose reversion he had boldly courted, in the possession shrivelled his soul to nothing, and left him dead! It was not easy to be God—even over one human being.

But Gnulemah, in her mighty earnestness, knelt a little nearer, so that the edge of the sunlight in which Balder stood smote the golden ornaments that clung round her outstretched arms. She almost touched him, but though his spirit recoiled, the dull flesh would not be moved.

“I knew it would not be always so!” she continued, an appealing vehemence quivering through her tones. “Some day I knew I should see Him and know Him more clearly. Shine on me, my Balder!—am not I your priestess? In the morning do not I worship you?—and at noon, and in the evening? And at night do not I kneel at your altar, and call on you to remember me while I sleep? Hear me, Balder! I see you in all things—they meet again in you! The sun himself is but your shadow! Do not I know you, my Balder? Be not clouded from your servant! Leave me not — take me back with you when you go!”

It was at this moment that the young man's mind, stumbling stupidly this way and that, chanced upon that picture of the courtesan leering from the open window in the city street, beckoning him to come to her. He seemed to see her there in Gnulemah's place,

beckoning, making a grisly parody of Gnulemah's expression and gestures. Could devils stand in the spot consecrated by angels? or was this angel a worse devil in disguise? In the same day—to him, the same man—could two such voices speak—such faces look? And could the germ of Godhood abide in a soul liable to the irony of such vicarious solicitation?

Speech or motion was still denied him. Now his priestess, emboldened by religious passion, dared to touch with hers his divine hand, on the finger of which glittered the token of murder. The hand was so cold and lax, that even the smooth warmth of her soft fingers failed to put life in it.

“You have taken Hiero to yourself—take me also! Be my God as well as his, for I shall be alone, now he is gone. This is his ring, which he always wore”—

Balder roughly snatched back his hand.

“Hiero's ring?”

"Why do you look so? Is it not a sign from him to me?"

"Hiero's ring? tell me, Gnulemah, is this Hiero's ring? Stop—stand up. There is no God in me!—Hiero's ring!"

"Where is Hiero, then?" demanded Gnulemah, rising and dilating. "You wear his ring—what have you done with him? Is there no God?"

The words came tossed on waves of deep-drawn breaths, for her soul was in a tumult. Her life had thus far been like a sequestered pool, reflecting only the sky and the ferns and flowers that bent round its margin; ignorant of its own depth and nature. Now—invaded by storm, God and nature seemed swept away and lost, and a terror of loneliness darkened over it.

"Is there no Balder?" reiterated Gnulemah. But all at once the fierceness in her eyes melted, as lightning is followed by summer rain. She

came so near, (he standing dulled with the horror of his discovery,)—came so near that her breath touched him, and he could hear the faint rustling of the white byssus on her bosom and the soft tinkle of the pendants that glowed against her black hair, and could see how profoundly real her beauty was. Mighty and beneficent, indeed, must be the force or the law that could combine the rude elements of nature into such a form of life as this!

“ Let me live for you and serve you. Though the world has no Balder, may not I have mine? You shall be everything to me. Without you I cannot be—but I want no other God if I have my Balder.”

This was another matter! Nevertheless, so subtle is the boundary between divine and human love, Gnulemah in these first passionate moments may easily have thought the one no less sublime than the other. But there was no danger of Balder's falling into such an error;

the distinction was clear to him from the first. Yet, his remorse and abasement strove with the defiant impulse which bade him pluck and eat—forgetful of this world and the next—the royal fruit so fairly held to his lips.

For, herein fails the divinity of nature:—she can minister to man's depravity as well as exaltation: which could not happen were she one with God. Nay, man had need be strong with divine inspiration, before he may commune unharmed with nature's dangerous loveliness.

His hand in Gnulemah's was now neither cold nor lax. She raised it in impetuous homage to her forehead: the diamond left a mark there, first white, then red. Then, for a breath or two, their eyes saw depths in each other beyond words' fathoming. . . .

A door was closed above, and the echo stole down stairs and crept with a hollow whisper into the conservatory. The little lord-cham-

berlain fluttered down from his lofty perch, and hovered between the two faces, his penetrating note sounding like a warning. Gnulemah held back, and a swift blush drew its rosy veil from the golden gleam of her jewelled forehead-band to below the golden head of the serpent which twisted round her neck.

One parting look she gave Balder, pregnant of new wonder, fear and joy. Then she turned and glided with quick ophidian grace to the doorway whence she had first appeared ; and was eclipsed by the curtain. Balder heard the inner door shut—she was gone. Dull—dull and colourless was the conservatory. The hoopoe flew out through the hall into the open air. Only the crocodile continued to keep Balder company.

After standing a few moments, he once more threw himself down on the moss-couch beneath the palm trees. There he reclined as before, supported on his elbow; and turned the

diamond ring this way and that upon his finger,
in moody pre-occupation.

Was the crocodile asleep, or stealthily watching him?

XIX.

BEFORE SUNDOWN.

HAD Balder Helwyse been in vein for self-criticism at this juncture, the review might probably have dissatisfied him. He possessed qualities that make men great. He could have discharged august offices, for he saw things in large relations and yet minutely. His mind and courage could rise to any enterprise and carry it cheerfully and with ease. His nature was receptive even more than active. He had force of thought to electrify nations.

But his was the old story of the star-gazer walking into the well—who might have studied the stars in the well, but could not be warned of the well by the stars. He had more than once whistled grand human chances down the wind, reaching after what was superhuman. Vast had

been his hunger, but the food wherewith he had filled himself nourished him not, and suddenly he had collapsed ! His first actual step towards the realisation of his lofty aspirations had landed him low amongst earth's common criminals—nor had the harm stopped there. That defiant impulse to which he had but now been on the point of yielding, had not dared so much as to have faced his unvitiated will. He was disorganised and at the mercy of events, because without law sufficient to keep and guide himself withal.

Though fallen, there was somewhat giant-like in him, perhaps easier to see now than before, as the ruin seems vaster than the perfect building. The travail of a soul like Balder's must issue greatly whether for good or ill. He could not stay long inchoate, but the elements would combine to make something either darker or brighter than had been before. Meanwhile in the uncrystallised solution the curious analyst

might detect traits fair or sinister, which would be ordinarily invisible. Here were softness, impetuosity, romantic imagination and tender fire enough to set up half-a-dozen poets. On the other hand there was a fund of malignity, coldness and subtlety adequate to the making of an Iago. Here, too, were the clear sceptical intellect, the fertility and versatile power of brain that only the loftier minds of the world have shown.

Such seemingly incongruous qualities are in the human crucible so mingled, proportioned and refined as to form what looks a simple transparent whole. We may feel the presence of a spirit weighty, strong and deep, without understanding the how and why of the impression. Only at critical moments like this in Balder's life, can we see to point out the joining-lines.

Balder's present attitude, viewed from whatever side, was no less irksome than ignoble:

one misfortune was with diabolic ingenuity dovetailed into another. It was bad enough to have killed a man; but Balder's victim was his own uncle, and the father—at least, the foster-father—of Gnulemah. And she, forsooth, must idolise the murderer; and finally, the murderer's heart must leap forth in passionate response to hers at the very moment—partly, perhaps, for the very reason—that every honest motive forbade it.—That look and touch at the molten point of various emotions, seemed to have welded their spirits together at once and lastingly.

What next ? for Gnulemah and himself which course was least disastrous ? The heroic line—to leave her without another word ? or, concealing his crime, should he stay and be happy in her arms ? Was there any third alternative ?

“To part would be yet worse for her than me ; she would think I had deceived her. And, love apart, how can I leave her whose only protector I have killed ? That deed puts me in his

place: so love and duty are at one for once. Her Balder—her God—she calls me! She is my universe! the depth and limit of my knowledge and power are gauged by her!—such is the issue of my ambition.” He breathed out a half laugh, ending in a sigh. “But loving her is sweeter than to inform creation,” he added aloud.—

The crocodile made no reply. Balder went on fingering the tell-tale ring and talking with himself, the earth meanwhile slowly turning her warm shoulder to the western sun. A still half-light filled the conservatory as with a clear mellow liquor, and the rich leaves and blossoms stood breathless and motionless with delight, living through every cell. The painfully rigid contraction of Helwyse’s features was softening away; he was coming into harmony with the sensuous beauty of the scene; and its refined voluptuousness, serenely unambitious, content with time and careless of eternity—interpreted his altered temper.

Be happy in the sunshine, O men and women! Love and kiss—bow down, and worship each the other! Who can tell of another joy like this? Everlasting knows it not, for the flavour of death only can give it perfection! Save for the fore-shadow of midnight, noon-day were not beautiful. But when the night comes, sink ye in one another's arms and sleep! Heaven-on-earth is a richer, stronger draught than Heaven only. But pray that in vouchsafing death it cheat you not of annihilation!—

He had forgotten that there was anything ugly in the world, or that the blindest cannot always escape the gorgon. He recked not the danger of bringing a being such as Gnu-lemah face to face with the customs and fashions of modern life, nor bethought him that his murderous secret would still be nearer his heart than she could ever come. Neither, during this fortunate moment, did dread of his secret's detection harass him.

Oddly, too, it was not to domestic comforts,—the love of wife, children, and friends,—nor yet to the absorbing studies of a profession, that Balder looked for a shield against inward trouble. Hope held him no more than fear; his happiness must be in freedom from both. He thought only of the Gnulemah of to-day,—unique, beautiful, untamed, divinely ignorant,—but whose heart walked before, leading the giddy mind by paths the wisest dared not tempt. The tones of her voice, the shiftings of her expression, her look, her touch—he recalled them all. He centred time and space in her. Change, new conditions, succession of events—these came not near her. Their life should know neither past nor future, but abide a constant Now—until the end!

His lips followed his thought with soundless movement. Handsome lips they were—the under, full, but sharply defined from the bulwark-chin; the upper, slender, boldly curved,

firm, yet sensitive. The mouth was in some sort a compendium of the man's physical nature. His eyes, large and almost as dark as Gnulemah's, albeit far different in effect, were now in-looking; their pupils, ever extraordinarily large and brilliant, almost filled the broad space between the lids. His hair clung round his head in yellow curls; his dark, dense eyebrows arched at ease. In the enchanted evening glow he looked—with his velvet doublet and well-moulded limbs—the ideal fairy prince, noble, wise, and valiant, conquering fate and misfortune for love's sake. They were brave princes, they of old time; but one wonders whether the giants and enchanters now-a-days are not stronger and subtler than they used to be!

XX.

BETWEEN WAKING AND SLEEPING.

THERE was an old woman in the house who went by the name of Nurse, her duties being to cook the meals and preserve a sort of order in such of the rooms as were occupied by the family. Since the greater part of the house was uninhabited, and there were only two mouths beside her own to be fed, Nurse was not without her leisure moments. How were they employed? Not in gossiping, for she had no cronies. Not in amateur millinery and dress-making, for there were no admiring eyes to reward such labours. Not in gadding, for she might not transcend the imprisoning wall. Not even in reading, perhaps because she was not much of a proficient in that art.

The truth is, that—to the outward eye, at

least—she was uniformly idle. For years past she had spent many hours of day and night in a corner of the kitchen fire-place, which was as large, roomy, and smoke-seasoned as any in story-books or mediæval halls. Here sat she winter and summer, her body bent forward over her knees, her disfigured face supported on one hand, while the other lay across her breast. This was her ordinary position, and she seldom moved to change it. She hummed tunes to herself sometimes,—not hymn-tunes,—but she never was heard to speak an articulate word. Often you might have thought her asleep,—but no ! When you least expected it, a shining black eye was fixed upon you—an eye which, two hundred years ago, would have convicted its owner of witchcraft. It was the only bright thing about the poor woman.

Whenever the master of the house came into the kitchen, Nurse followed him, animal-like, with this witch eye : no movement of his, no

expression, seemed to escape her. A curious observer would sometimes have remarked in her, during the first few moments after the master's entrance, a muffled agitation, an irregularity of the breath, an obscure anxiety and suspense, which, however, would soon subside, and rarely recur during his stay. This phenomenon had been observable daily for now nearly a score of years, yet nothing had meanwhile happened to explain or justify it. What did it mean? Had an original fear—groundless or not—prolonged a phantom existence precisely because it had never met fulfilment?

Often for weeks at a time complete silence would obtain between master and Nurse. He would enter and ramble hither and thither the ample kitchen, eat what had been prepared for him, and be off again without word or glance of acknowledgment. Or again, pacing irregularly to and fro before the fire-place, he would pour forth long disjointed rhapsodies, wild specula-

tions, hopes and misgivings; his mood changing from solemnity to hysteric gaiety, and back through gusty passion to morbid gloom. But never did he address his words to Nurse so much as to himself or to some imaginary interlocutor; and she for her part never answered him a syllable. Yet she was ever alert to listen, and sometimes that subdued trembling would come on, and the obstruction of the breath. But when the rhapsodist, in mid-excitement of speech, snatched his violin and drew from it melodies weirdly exquisite, soothing his diseased thoughts and harmonising them, Nurse would become once more composed; the phantom apprehension was again laid by; and the violinist would presently fall into silence, sometimes into sleep. And still, while he slept, would the witch-eye watch him,—but with an expression of uncouth yearning intensity that seldom ventured forth when he was awake.

With Gnulemah Nurse's intercourse had be-

come every year more infrequent. As the child arose to womanhood, she grew apart from the voiceless creature who had cared for her in infancy. It was not Gnulemah's fault—her heart was never barren of loving impulses. But mother, father, were words whose meaning she had never been taught; and had Nurse comprehended the unconscious thirst and hunger of the girl's soul—unconscious, but none the less harmful—she might have tried, by dint of affectionate observances and companionship, to continue the motherly office which she had filled in the beginning. But this was not to be. Some hidden agency forced the two ever further asunder. Moreover, Gnulemah developed rapidly, while Nurse fell into a process of gradual congealment; her wits and emotions became torpid. And Nurse was the victim of disfigurement, physical as well as spiritual; while Gnulemah, both naturally and by training, was sensitive to beauty and ugliness. Other

surface causes no doubt there were beside the hidden one, which was the most potent of all.—

A considerable time had passed since Gnulemah's departure, when Balder became aware that he was no longer alone in the conservatory. His thoughts were all of Gnulemah, and he looked quickly round in the expectation of seeing her. The sight of a widely different object startled him to his feet!

A female figure stood before him, wrapped in a sad-coloured garment of anomalous description, her head tied up in dark turban-like folds of cloth. Locks of rusty black hair escaped from beneath this head-dress, and hung down on both sides her face. She might once have been tall and erect, but her form now sagged to the left, losing both height and dignity. Her visage, seamed and furrowed by the scar of some terrible accident, had lost its natural contour. The left eye was extinguished, but the right remained—the only feature left in its ori-

ginal state. It was dark and bright, and by very virtue of its disfigured environment, possessed a repulsive kind of beauty. Its influence was peculiar. In itself it postulated an owner in the prime of life, handsome and graceful. But one's attention wandering, the woman's actual ugliness impressed the observer with an intensity enhanced by the imaginary contrast.

A fantastic analogy was thus brought to light. The woman was dual—her right side lived; the left—blind, inert, and soulless—was dragged about as a dead weight. It was an unnatural emphasising of the spiritual-material composition of human kind. Observable, moreover, was her strange method of disguising emotion. There was no muscular constraint; she simply turned her blank left side towards the spectator, with an effect like the interposition of a dead wall.

Such—on Balder's abnormally excited apprehension—was the impression the nurse pro-

duced. She, on her part, was perhaps more disconcerted than he at a meeting which she could not have anticipated. Her single eye settled upon him in a panic of surprise. The dressing of the scene gave Balder a grisly reminder of the first moments of Gnulemah's eloquent astonishment. There was as great a difference between the superb Egyptian and this poor creature as between good and evil; but there was also the disagreeable suggestion of a similar kind of relationship. Gnulemah, withered, stifled and degraded by some unmentionable curse, might have become a being not unlike this woman.

"Have we not met before, madam?" asked Helwyse, impelled to the question by what he took for a bewildered recognition in the woman's eye.

She moved her lips, but made no audible answer.

"I am Balder Helwyse," continued he; for

he had already made up his mind that all concealments, save one, would be unnecessary.

A grotesque quake of emotion travelled through the woman's body, and she gave utterance to a harsh, inarticulate sound. She hobbled confusedly forwards, groping with her hands outstretched. Balder, though not wont to fail in courtesy to the sorriest hag alive, could scarce forbear recoiling, especially because he fancied that an expression of horrible affection was struggling to get through the scarred encrustation of the woman's nature.

Perhaps she marked the inward shrinking, for she checked herself at once, and turning her lifeless screen, hid behind it. It was impotent deprecation translated into flesh, a sight at once ludicrous and painful. The young man found such difficulty in concealing his distaste, that he blushed in the twilight at his own rudeness. He would do his best to redeem himself.

"Doctor Hiero Glyphic is my uncle," said he,

moving to get on Nurse's right side, and speaking in his pleasantest tone. "Is he at home? I have come a long way to see him."

Preoccupied with his amiable desire to reassure Nurse, Helwyse had got to the end of this speech before he realised the ghastly mockery in it. Nevertheless it was well. Even thus boldly and falsely must he speak and act henceforth. He had opened the path by a happy accident, and must see to it that his further steps were not retrograde.

Still the woman answered not a word, which was the less surprising inasmuch as she had been dumb for a quarter of a century past. But Balder, supposing her silence to proceed from stupidity or deafness, repeated more loudly and peremptorily,—

"Doctor Glyphic—is he here?—is he alive?"

He felt a morbid curiosity to hear what reply would be made to the question whose answer only he could know. But he was puzzled to

observe that it threw Nurse into a state of agitation as great as though she herself had been the perpetrator of Balder's crime. She stood quaking and irresolute, now peeping for a moment from behind her screen, then dodging back with an increase of panic.

This display, rendered more uncouth by its voicelessness, revolted the æsthetic sensibilities of Helwyse. Besides, what was the meaning of it? Had it been actually Davy Jones, with whom he had striven on the midnight sea? and had his adversary, instead of drowning, spread his bat's wings for home, leaving his supposititious murderer to disquiet himself in vain? Verily, a practical joke worthy of its author!

This conceit revealed others, as a lightning flash the midnight landscape. He was encircled by witchcraft—had been ferried by a real Charon to no imaginary Hades. The quaint secluded beauty of circumstance was an illusion, soon to be dispelled. Gnulemah her-

self—miserable thought!—was perhaps a thing of evil; what if this very hag were she under another form?—Glancing round in the deepening twilight, Balder fancied that the dark plants and tropic shrubs assumed demoniac forms, bending and crowding round him. That old witch yonder was muttering some infernal spell; already he felt numbness in his limbs, dizziness in his brain!—

The devils are gathering nearer: a heavy, heated atmosphere quivers before his eyes,—or else the witch and her unholy crew are joining in a reeling dance! In vain does Balder try to shut his eyes and escape the giddy spectacle; they stare widely open, and see things supernatural! Nor can he ward off the spectres with his hands, which are rigid before him, and defy his will. The devilish jig grows wilder, and careers through the air, Balder sweeping with it. In mid-whirl he sees the crocodile, cold, motionless, waiting with long dry jaws—for what?

A cry breaks from him ; with a wrench that strains his heart, he bursts loose from the devil's bonds that confine his limbs. The witch has vanished, and Helwyse seems to himself to fall headlong from a vast height, striking the earth, at last helpless and broken.

“ Gnulemah ! ”

Gasping out that name, he becomes insensible.

Beneath an outside of respectable composure had long turmoiled the tides of such remorse and pain as only a man at once largely and finely made can feel. Added to mental excitement carried through many phases to the distraction-point, there had been bodily exertion, and want of food and sleep. The apparition of unnatural ugliness, of behaviour, as strange as her looks, coming upon him in this untoward condition, needed not the heat of the conservatory and the stupifying breath of the plants to drive him to brief delirium and un-

consciousness. As he lies there, let us remember that his last word threw back the unworthy, dark misgiving that beauty and deformity, good and evil, could by any jugglery become convertible.

As a matter of fact, however, Nurse was no witch, nor had she of her own will and knowledge done Balder any harm; on the contrary, she was already at work, with trembling hands and painfully thumping heart to relieve his sad case. She was touched and agitated to a singular degree. It was not the first time in her patient's life that she had tended him. The reader has guessed her secret—that she had known Balder before he knew himself, and had cared for him when his only cares had been to eat and sleep. She knew her baby at the first glance, through his manly stature and mature features—less from his likeness to his father than from certain uneffaced traces of infantine form and expression. She was of gypsy blood,

and had looked upon few human faces since last seeing his. He did not recognise her until some time afterwards; all things considered, it was hardly possible he should do so.

It was curious to observe how awkwardly she managed emotions which had once flowed but too readily. She was moved by impulses which she had forgotten how to interpret. The only outlet was through her solitary eye, which might well have given way under the strain thus put upon it. But by and by the inward heat began to thaw the stiff outward crust, the accretion of so many years. One had glimpses underneath of the handy, affectionate, sympathising woman, emerging from the long fossilisation in which she had been embedded. Her withered heart once more hungered and thirsted, and that strange duality tended to melt back into unity again.

Balder's attack at length began to yield, and a drowsy consciousness returned, memory and

reason being still partly in abeyance. His heavy half-opened eyes rested upon darkness. A crooning sound was in his ears—a nursery lullaby, wordless, but soothing. Where was he? Had he been ill? was he in his cradle at home? was Salome sitting by to watch him and give him medicine?—Yes, very ill he was, —but would be better in the morning. And he would be a good boy meanwhile—not cry and make a fuss to trouble Salome.

“Nurse—Sal!—I say Sal!”

Salome bent over him as of old.

“Had such a funny dream—dreamt I was grown up and—killed a man!—What makes you shake so, Sal? It wasn’t true, you know; and I’m going to be good and go to sleep. Good night. Give a kiss from me to—my—little—”

So he sinks into slumber, profound as ever wooed his childhood, his head pillowed in Salome’s lap, his funny dream forgotten.

XXI.

WE PICK UP ANOTHER THREAD.

DARKNESS and silence reigned in the conservatory; the group of the sleeping man and attendant woman was lost in the warm gloom, and scarcely a motion, the low drawing of a breath, told of their presence. A great gray owl which had passed the day in some obscure corner, launched darkling forth upon the air, and winged hither and thither, once or twice fanning the sleeper's face with silent pinions. The crocodile lazily edged off the stone, plumped quietly into the water, and clambered up the hither margin of the pool, there coming to another long pause. A snail making a night journey across the floor, found in its path a diamond, sparkling with a light of its own. The snail extended a cool, cautious tentacle,—recoiled it

fastidiously, and shaped a new course. A broad petal from a tall flowering shrub dropped wavering down, and seemed about to light on Balder's forehead, but swerving at the last moment, came to rest on the scaly head of the crocodile. The night waited and listened as though for something to happen—for some one to appear! Salome was waiting for some one too—was it for the dead?—

Meanwhile pictures from the past glimmered in her memory. When in our magic mirror we saw her struck down by the hand of her lover, she was far from being the repulsive object she is now. Indeed, but for that chance word let fall yesterday about her having been badly burnt, we should be at a loss to justify our recognition.

After Manetho's rude dismissal of her she fled, not knowing whither better, to Thor Helwyse, who was living widowed in the Brooklyn house with his son and daughter. Because

she had been Helen's attendant, she besought Helen's husband to give her a home. She was in sore trouble, but said no more than this; and Thor, suspecting nothing of her connection with Manetho, gladly received her as nurse to his children.

But her sins and imprudences would find out Salome no less than others. At the critical moment for herself and her fortunes, the house took fire: she risked her life to save Thor's daughter; was herself burned past recognition, and (one misfortune treading on another's heels) she balanced on death's threshold for a month or two. She got well in part, but the power of speech had left her, and beauty of face and figure were for ever gone.

In her manifold wretchedness, and after such devotion shown, it was not in Thor's warm heart to part with her; so, losing much, she gained something. She remained with her benefactor, whose manly courtesy ever forebore

to probe the secret of her woman's heart, over which as over her face she always wore a veil. The world saw Salome no more. She sat in the nursery watching year by year a dark-eyed little maiden playing on the floor with a fair-haired boy. Broad-shouldered Thor would enter with his grand kindly face and royal beard : would kiss the girl and tussle with the boy, mightily laughing the while at the former's solicitude for her playmate : would throw himself back on the groaning sofa, and exclaim in his deep voice,—

“God bless their dear little souls ! why, Nurse, when did a brother and sister ever love each other like that—eh ?”

Salome was probably not unhappy then : indeed—whether consciously or not—she was at her happiest. But new events were at hand. Thor, growing yearly more restless, at length resolved to sell his house and go to Europe, taking with him Salome and both the children.

Everything was settled and ready, down to the packing of Salome's box. A day or two before the sailing Thor went over to New Jersey to bid farewell to his eccentric brother-in-law. It was a warm summer's day, and the children played from morning to night in the front yard, while Nurse sat in the nursery window and kept her eye on them,—her thoughts perhaps travelled elsewhere.

Since her misfortune she had no doubt had more opportunity, than most women, for reflection: silence breeds thought. What she thought about no one knew, but she could hardly have forgotten Manetho. On this last evening, when she was on the point of leaving America forever, it would have been strange had no memory of him passed through her mind.

She had not heard his name in the last four years, and she knew that he suspected nothing of her whereabouts. Had he ever wished to see her?—she wondered; and thought "he

would not know me if he did !” With that came a tumultuous longing to look once more upon him. Too late ! why had she not thought of this before ? Now must her last memory of him be still as he looked when, disfigured by sudden rage, he turned and struck her on the bosom. There was the scar yet—the fire had spared it ! It was a keepsake which, as time passed on, Salome had strangely learned to love !

It was growing dark,—time for the children to come in. There they sat, deep in the abundant grass, weaving necklaces out of dandelion stems. Nurse leant out of window and beckoned to attract their attention. But they were too much absorbed to notice her, or else were wilfully blind ; so she rose to go out and fetch them.

Before reaching the open front-door, she stopped short, and her heart seemed to turn over. A tall dark man was leaning over the

fence talking with the little girl. Nurse shrank within the shadow of the door, and thence peeped and listened as well as her beating pulses would let her.

“ I know where fairy-land is,” says the man, in the soft engaging tone that the listener so well remembers. “ Come, shall we go together and visit it ? ”

“ He come too ? ” asks the little maiden, pointing towards the boy, who is portentously busy over his dandelions.

“ He may if he likes,” the man answers, with a smile ; “ but we must make haste, or fairy-land will be shut up ! ”

It flashes into Salome’s head what this portends. She had heard this man vow revenge on Thor long ago, and she now sees how he means to keep his oath. He has shrewdly improved the opportunity of Thor’s absence, and has come to carry off either his son or his daughter. Fortune, it seems, has

chosen to give him the dark-eyed little girl. See—he stoops and lifts her gently over the fence—and they are off for fairy-land!

Rush out, Salome! alarm the neighbourhood and force the kidnapper to give up his booty! After all Thor's kindness to you, can you be false to him? Besides, what motive have you for unfaithfulness?—grant that you love this man—what harm, save to his revengeful passion, could result from thwarting his purpose?

Salome acted oddly on this occasion—it would seem, irrationally. But what appears to the spectator a trivial modification of circumstances, may have vital weight with the actor. Had Manetho taken off Balder, for example, it might have suggested to Salome another and more intelligible course than the one she actually took.—She hurried from the door, and caught the man by the arm before he was a dozen paces on his way. He turned,

savage but frightened, setting down the little girl, but not letting go her hand. She, for her part, was in the happiest humour, and informed Nurse that she was going to be queen of fairy-land!

Nurse lifted the veil from her face and looked straight at the man with her one eye. It was enough—he saw in her but a hideous object—would never know her for the bright handsome young woman whom he had once professed to love. He did not offer to escape, but stood suspicious and on his guard; already half-prepared, however, from something in the woman's manner, to find her a confederate.

“S'e come too?” chirped the unconscious little maiden.

But his attention was turned to some words that Salome was writing in the little blank-book which she always carried in her pocket. She offered to help him in carrying off the

child on condition of being admitted one of the party! He looked narrowly at the woman, but could make nothing by his scrutiny. Was it love for the child that prompted her behaviour? no—for she could easily have raised the neighbourhood against him. She puzzled him: but she would make no explanations.

What if he should accept her offer? she would be an advantage as well as an inconvenience. The child would have the care to which it had been used, and he would thus be spared much embarrassment. When her help became superfluous, it would not be hard to give her the slip.

There was little leisure for reflection. The agreement was made—on Salome's part with a secret sense of intense triumph, not unmixed with fear and pain. She caught up Master Balder and his dandelions, kissed and hugged him violently, and locked him in the nursery, where he was found some hours afterwards by

his father, in a state of great hunger and indignation. But the dark-haired little maiden was seen no more. She was gone to her kingdom of fairyland, and Nurse with her. Long mourned Balder for his vanished playmate!—

Salome has kept her secret well. And now there she sits, her long-lost baby's head in her lap, thinking of old times; and the longer she thinks the more she softens and expands. Has she done a great wrong in her life?—Surely she has suffered greatly, and in a way that might well wither her to the core. But there must still have been a germ of life left in the shrivelled seed, which this night—memorable in her existence—has begun to quicken.

By and by come a few tears, with a struggle at first, then more easily. Kind darkness lets us think of Salome, bright and comely, as in the old days, with the addition of that inward beauty wrought by sad experience. But, in truth, she is marred past earthly recovery.

Nothing removes a soul so far from human sympathy as self-repression, especially for any merely human sake!

The night creeps reluctantly westward; the grey owl wings back to his shady corner; the adventurous snail, half-way up the palm tree, glues himself there, and turns in for a nap. The crocodile has resumed his old position on the rock in the pool, and the flower-petal is floating on the water. Here comes the brilliant hoopoe, with his bright crest and clear chirrup, impatient to bid Gnulemah good morning. All is as before, save that the group beneath the palm trees has disappeared.

Balder slept late, yet when he awoke he thought he must be dreaming still. He could not distinguish reality from imagination. His mind had lost its grasp—his will its authority. Where was he? Was it years or hours since he had entered Boston Harbour?

Suddenly rose before him the vision of the deadly struggle on the midnight sea! and round this central point the others crystallised in order. Balder's heart sank, and he sighed most heavily. After a few moments, however, he rose to his elbow and stared about in bewilderment. Had he ever seen this room before? How came he here?

He was lying on a carved bedstead, furnished with sheets of finest linen, and a counterpane of blue embroidered satin; but all wearing a look of great age. The chamber was oval like a bird's egg halved lengthwise; the smoothly-vaulted ceiling being frescoed with a crowd of figures. The rich and costly furniture harmonised with the bedstead, and bore the same marks of age. The chairs and lounge were satin-covered, the sumptuous toilet-table was fitted with a crystal mirror, the arched window was curtained with azure satin and lace. It was a chamber fit for a princess of the old *regime*,

and unaltered since its fair occupant last abode in it.

From the upholstery Balder turned to the frescoes, which covered both wall and ceiling. The subject seemed at the first glance to be a Last Judgment, but further examination corrected this notion, though there could be no doubt that heaven and hell were portrayed. A mingled rush of forms mounted on one side to the bright zenith, and thence lapsed confusedly down the opposite descent. The dark end of the room was a cloud of gloomily fantastic shapes, swerved from the main stream, and becoming darker and more formless the further they receded, till at the last they were lost in murky shadow. Not entirely lost, however, for as Balder gazed awfully thitherward, the shadow seemed to resolve itself into a mass of intertwined and struggling beings—neither animal nor human, but combining the more unholy elements of both.

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But from the centre of the upward stream shone forms and faces of angelic beauty. Yet on looking more narrowly, Balder found in each one some ghastly peculiarity, revealing itself just when the enjoyment of the beauty was on the point of being complete. Such was the effect, that the angelic forms were translated into mocking demons, and where the light seemed brightest, there was the spiritual darkness most profound !

In the zenith was a white lustre, which obliterated distinction of form as much as did the cloudy obscurity at the end of the room. Now the design seemed about to be unfolded, then again it eluded the gazer's grasp. Suddenly, at length, it stood revealed. A gigantic face, with wide-floating hair and beard, looked down into Balder's own. Its expression was of infinite malignity and despair. The impersonation of all that is wicked and miserable, its place was at the top of Heaven ; it was

moulded of those aspiring forms of light, and was the goal which the brightest of them attained! Moreover,—either by some ugly coincidence, or how otherwise he could not conceive,—this countenance of supreme evil was the very reflex of Balder's—a portrait minutely true, and, spite of its satanic expression, growing every moment more unmistakable.

Was this accident, or the contrivance of an unknown and unfathomable malice? Balder, Lord of Heaven, instinct with the essence of Hell! A grim satire that on his religious speculations. But what satirist had been bitter enough to forestall the years?—for this painting must have been designed while Balder was still an infant.

He threw himself off the bed and stepped to the window, and saw the blue sky, and the river rhyming it. The breath of the orchard visited him, and he was greeted by the green

grass and trees. He sighed with relief. There had been three mornings since his return to America. For the first he had blessed his own senses; the second had looked him out of countenance; but the third came with a benediction serene and mighty, such as Balder's soul had not heretofore been open to.

"This is more than a plaster heaven!" said he, looking up; "but, Balder Helwyse, I fear your only heaven thus far has been of plaster. You have seen this morning what the God of such a heaven looks like. How about the God of this larger Heaven, think you?"

Presently he turned away from the window, but he had quaffed so deeply of the morning glory that the sinister frescoes no longer depressed him. They were ridiculously unimportant—nothing more than stains on the wall, indeed! Balder could not tell why he felt light-hearted; it was a solemn light-heartedness—not the gaiety of sensuous spirits, such as he

had known heretofore. It had little to do with physical well-being, for the young man was still faint and dizzy. Moreover, he was weak from hunger. Behold, then, at the foot of the bed, a carved table covered with a damask cloth, and crowned with an abundant breakfast!—not an ordinary breakfast of coffee and rolls, omelette and beefsteak, but a pastoral breakfast—fresh milk, bread and honey, fruit, and mellow cheese—such food as Adam might have begun the day with.

In face of the yet unsolved mystery of his own presence in the room, this new wonder caused Balder no special surprise. Of the previous evening he remembered nothing after the apparition of the ugly dumb woman. Could she have transported him hither?—Well, he would not let himself be disturbed by apparent miracles. “No doubt the explanation is absurdly simple!” thought he; and with that he began his toilet.

The dressing-table displayed a variety of dainty articles such as a lady might be supposed to use—pearl-handled brushes, enamelled powder-boxes, slender vases of Meissen porcelain, a fanciful ring-stand. From the half-open drawer one caught a rich glimpse of an Indian fan. A pair of delicate kid gloves, that only a woman's hand could have worn, were thrown carelessly on the table. There were still the little wrinkles in the fingers; but time had changed the original white to a mouldy yellow.

“Whose hands could have worn them?—whose chamber was this?” mused Balder. “Not Gnulemah's; she knows nothing of powder and kid gloves! and besides these were in use before she was born. Whose face was reflected from this glass when those gloves were thrown down here? Was that her marriage-bed, perhaps? Were children born in it?”

His seizure of the night before must have dulled the edge of his wit, else he had scarce asked questions which chance now answered for him. A scratch in one corner of the polished mirror-surface showed, on closer inspection, a name and date, written with a diamond. Shading off the light with his hand, Balder read, "Helen, 1831."

"My mother's name; the year I was born! My mother!" he repeated softly, taking up the old yellow gloves. "And this room was my birthplace—and my little sister's.—My mother's things as she left them; for father told me once he never went in her room after she died. She died here,—and here my little sister and I began to live; and here I am again—really the same little, helpless, innocent baby that cried on that bed so long ago—only not innocent now!"

"How happy that barber was yesterday!—prattled about being born again. Can I not be born again—to-day, in this room? I first

began here, and have come round the world to my starting-point. I'll start afresh this morning!"

And heavily as he was weighted in the new race, he would not be disheartened; unuttered resolves made his courage high, and brightened his eyes!

Before beginning his breakfast, he returned to the window, and drank again of the divine blue and green. From the branch of a near tree the hoopoe startled him, and made him colour. Was the bird an emissary from Gnulémah?—Balder's mouth drew back, and his chin and eyes strengthened, as though some part of his unuttered resolves were recalled by the bird's voice.

When he was ready to go, he turned at the door and threw a parting glance round the dainty old-fashioned chamber, trying to gather into one all thoughts, memories, and resolves connected with it. He had nearly forgotten

the frescoes; the victorious sunshine had reduced the figures, satanic or beautiful, to a meaningless maze of wandering lines and faded colours. As for his own portrait, it was no longer distinguishable.

XXII.

HEART AND HEAD.

BALDER easily found his way to the conservatory, but it was empty—Gnulemah, at least, was not there! The tapestry-curtain in her doorway was pushed aside, the door itself open. Where should he seek her?

As he stood in doubt, he saw lying at his feet a violet. Picking it up, he caught sight of another a little beyond it, and still another on the threshold of the entrance-hall. These were Gnulemah's footsteps—the scent of that sweet quarry, teaching him how to follow her. So he followed, nor let one fragrant trace escape him; and presently he had a nosegay of them!

She was out-of-doors. Truly, on a day like this, where else should she be? what walls could presume to hold her? Her loveliness

was at one with Nature's, and they attracted each other. To the solitary nymph her mighty playmate had been all-sufficient, for she saw not the earth and sky as they appear now-a-days to mankind, but the divine meaning which they clothe. Thus she could converse with animals, and could read plants and stones more profoundly than botanist or geologist. She followed inward to her own fresh and beautiful soul, the sympathies that allied her to outward things, and found there their true prototypes.

But when the strong magnetism of a new human spirit began to act upon her, these fine communings with nature suffered disturbance. In such thunderstorms as the meeting forces must engender, there was need of a trustworthier safeguard than simple perception of the divine purpose underlying creation. Only the personal God is strong enough to govern the relations of soul with soul. Barren of Eve, Adam had not fallen ; but with her, he will one

day not only retrieve his fall, but climb to a sublimer height than any to which he could have aspired alone.

Balder strolled out on the wide lawn. Southward wound an avenue of great trees, overshadowing the narrow footpath that stole beneath them. To the right, round the northern corner of the house, he could see far off the white tops of blossoming apple-trees, and beyond, the river. The orchard-perfume came riding on the untamed breeze, and whispered a fragrant secret in the young man's ear. Orchard-ward he pursued his search.

As he went on, Gnulemah grew every moment nearer. At length he caught the flutter of her mantle amidst the foliage, and presently saw her on the brink of the precipice, looking out across the broad blue river. Thus had he spied her standing the day before, through his telescope. Were the crossing of a river and the passage of a night, all that divided his

past life from what he thought awaited him now !

While yet at a distance, he called to her—not from impatience, but because he stood in awe of the meeting, and wanted the first moments over. His voice touched Gnulemah like a beloved hand, and turned her towards him. Her face—which had not learned to be the mask of emotion, but was instead the full and immediate index thereof—brightened with joy : and as he came near, her joy increased. Yet a seriousness deep down in her eyes marked the shadow of a night and the dawn of another day. A spiritual chemistry had been working in her.

She did not move forward to meet him, but stood delighting in the sense of his ever-growing nearness. When at length he stood close before her, she drew a long pleasant breath and said,—

“ A beautiful morning ! ”

This was no common-place greeting, for it

was not made in a common-place way. It said that his coming had consummated the else imperfect beauty of nature, and won its expression from her lips. So the common-place wondered to find itself transmuted into a compliment of fine gold !

Gnulemah's attire to-day was more Diana-like than yesterday's, and looked as appropriate to her as leaves to trees, or clouds to the sky. Gnulemah's dress, indeed, was at no time so much a conventional appendage, as a living sensitive part of her, that might be supposed to change its colour and style in sympathy with her shifting moods and surroundings : yet never losing certain general traits which had their foundation in her individual nature.

"A beautiful morning !" returned Balder, taking her hand. "Were you expecting me ?"

"I was afraid you might not show yourself to me again !" said she, with sudden tears twinkling on her eyelashes. She seemed more

tenderly human and approachable to-day than heretofore. Had she found her mountain-height of unmated solitude untenable?—found in herself the yielding woman, and in him, the strength that is a man? This descent—which was a sweet ascent—made her endlessly more lovable!

“I come here always when I feel lonely,” added she. “If it had not been for this place with its great outlook, I should often have been too lonely to stay in the world!”

“We all need an outlook to a larger world, Gnulemah.”

“Besides—you came to me from the other side!” said she, glancing in his face.

“Did you see me there?” Balder was on the point of asking;—but he was wise enough to refrain. If he could believe it true, he would not tempt his happiness: if faith were lacking in him, why build a barrier against it? So he kept silence.

"You found my violets!" whispered Gnulemah, with a shy smile. "You understand all I do and am; it is happiness to be with you."

They sat down, by mutual consent, beneath a crooked old apple-tree, which yet blossomed as white and fresh as did the youngest in the orchard. From beneath this white perfumed tent was a view of the distant city.

Gnulemah could not be called talkative, yet in giving her thoughts expression she out-did all vocabularies. Many fine muscles there were around her eyes, at the corners of her mouth, and especially in the upper lip, whose subtle curvings and contractions spoke volumes of question, appeal, observation. Her form, by its endless shiftings, uttered delicate phrases of pleasure, surprise, or love; her hands and fingers were orators, and eloquent were the curlings and tappings of her Arab feet.

This kind of language would be a blank to one used to hear words rather than to feel

them : but Balder, in his present exalted mood, delighted in it. Was there any enjoyment more refined than to see his thought—before he had given it breath—lighten in the eyes of this daughter of fire? and with his own eyes to catch the first pure glimmer of her yet unborn fancies? A language genial of intimacy, for the linguists must feel in order to utterance—must meet each other from the heart outward at every point. The human form is made of meanings; it is the full thought of its Creator, comprising all other thoughts. Is it blind chance or lifeless expediency that moulds the curves of woman's bosom, builds up man's forehead like a citadel, and sets his head upon his shoulders? Is beauty beautiful, or are we cozened by a congenial ugliness?—But Balder's philosophic scepticism should never have braved such a test as Gnulemah!

Except music, painting, sculpture—all the arts and the inspiration of them—waited on

the nib of the pen, such talk as passed between these two could not be written. Some things—and those not the least profound and admirable of life—transcend the cunning of man to interpret them, unless to an apprehension as refined as they! We are fain to content ourselves with the husks, therefore.

“It must be happy there!” said Gnulemah, looking towards the city. “So many Balders and Gnulemahs!”

“Why happy?” asked the man of the world, with a little smile.

“We are but two, and have known each other since yesterday only; but they, you told me, are many as the stars, and have been together many yesterdays!”

Such was the woman’s unclinched argument, leaving the listener to draw the inference. He hesitated to forestall her enlightenment from the grim page of his own experience. And do not many pure and loving souls pass through the

world without once noticing how bad most of the roads are, and how vexed the climates? Might not the earthly heaven of Gnulemah's fancy tenderly blind her to the unheavenly earth of Balder's knowledge?

Through his abstraction Balder felt on his hand a touch soft as the flowing of a breath, yet pregnant of an indefinite apprehension. When two clouds meet, there is a momentary hush and calm; but the first seeming-trifling lightning-flash brings on the storm whereby earth's face is altered. So Balder, full-charged as the thunder-cloud, awaited fearfully the first vivid word which should light the way for those he was resolved to speak.

"I see you with open eyes, Balder, and touch you and hear you. Is this the end I thought would come? Balder, are you the greatest?" With full trust she appealed to him to testify of himself. This was the seriousness he had marked beneath the smile.

"Are you content it should be so, Gnulemah?"

She plucked a grass-blade and tied it in a knot, and began, drawing a trembling breath between each few words—

"Oh! Balder—if I must kneel to you as the last and greatest of all—if there is nothing too holy to be seen and touched—if there is no presence too sublime for me to comprehend——"

"What then?" asked he, meeting her troubled look with a strong cheerful glance.

"Then the world is less beautiful than I thought it—the sun is less bright—I am no longer pleasing to myself!" And tears began to flow down her grand cheeks. But Balder's eyes grew brighter: seeing which, Gnulemah was encouraged to continue—

"How could I ever be happy? for either I must draw myself away from you—oh, Balder!

—or else live as your equal, and so degrade you—for I am not a goddess !”

“Then there are no goddesses nor gods on earth ! Gnulemah, you need never shrink from me for that !”

The beautiful woman smiled through her sparkling eyelashes. She could love and sympathize with the man who, as a deity, bewildered and disappointed her. But was the intuition false which had revealed to her the sublime idea of a supreme, eternal God ?

They sat for a while in silence, neither venturing to look on the other's face. They had struck a sacred chord, and the sweet, powerful sound thrilled Gnulemah's innocence no less than her companion's knowledge. But presently Balder looked up ; his cheeks warmed, and his heart swelled out. He was about to put in jeopardy his most immediate jewel, and the very greatness of the risk gave him courage. Not to the world that could not judge him

righteously would he confess his crime, but to the woman he loved, and who loved him. Her verdict could not fail to be just and true.

Could a woman's judgment of her lover be impartial?—Yes, if her instincts be pure and harmonious, and her worldly knowledge that of a child. Her discrimination between right and wrong will be at once true and involuntary, like the test of a poison. Love for the wrong-doer would but sharpen her insight. The sentence would not be spoken, but would be readable in her eyes, untainted by prejudice or sophistry.

Gnulemah was thus made the touchstone of Balder's morality; he stood ready to abide by her decision. Her understanding of the case should first be made full; then, if condemned by her look, he would publish his crime to the world, and meet its penalty. But did her eyes absolve him,—then was crime an illusion, evil but undeveloped good, and the stain of blood a

prejudice. Cain was no outcast, but the venerable ancestor of true freedom!—

Unsearchable is the heart of man! Balder had looked forward to condemnation with a wholesome solemnity, which cheered while it chastened him. But the thought of acquittal—and at Gnulemah's hands—appalled him! the implicit consequences for humanity seemed far more formidable than the worst that condemnation could bring on himself. So much had he lately changed his point of view, that only the fear of seeing his former creed confirmed could have now availed to stifle his confession!

But that fear did not much disquiet him; he trusted too deeply in his judge to believe that she would justify it. In short, Gnulemah was in his opinion right-minded exactly in proportion as she should convict him of having been in the wrong! Balder resigned the helm of his vessel, laden as she was with the fruits of years of thought and speculation, and at this the most

critical moment of her voyage—resigned it to the guidance of a woman's unreasoning intuition! He might almost as well have said that the highest reach of intellect is to a perception of the better worth and wisdom of an unlearned heart!

XXIII.

OUR HERO TELLS AN UNTRUTH.

By way of enheartening himself for what he was to do, Balder kissed his posy of Gnulemah's fragrant footsteps. He kept his eyes down, lest she should see something in them to distract her attention from his story. He must go artfully to work,—gain her assent to the abstract principles,—before marshalling them against himself.

Meanwhile Gnulemah had picked up a gold-beetle, and was examining it with a certain grave interest.

"I never told you how I came by this ring of Hiero's. It was the night before I first saw you, Gnulemah."

"The ring guided you to me!" said she, glancing at his downcast visage.

"Perhaps it did!" he muttered, struck by the ingenious superstition; and he eyed the keen diamond half-suspiciously. How fiercely those little serpents were struggling for it! "But Hiero—he has lost it, and you will see him no more!"

"You are with me!" returns she, shining out at him from beneath her level brows. What should she know of loss and parting?

Balder still forbore to raise his face. Gnulemah was in a frolicsome humour, the reaction from her foregoing solemnity. But Balder, who deemed this hour the gravest of his life, was taken aback by her unseasonable gaiety. Casting about for means to sober her—an ungracious thing for a lover to do!—he hit upon the gold-beetle.

"Dead—the poor little beetle!—Do you know what death is, Gnulemah?"

"It is what makes life. The sun dies every night, to get life for the morning; and trees

die when cold comes, so as to smile out in green leaves again—greener than if there had been no death. It is so with everything!”

“Not with everything!” said Balder, taking her light-heartedness very gravely. “That gold beetle in your hand is dead, and will never live and move again.”

But at that Gnulemah smiled, and bringing her hand with the beetle in it, near her perfect lips, she lent it a full warm breath—enough to have enlivened an Egyptian scarabæus—and behold! the beetle spread its wings and whizzed away. Before Balder could recover from this unexpected turn, the lovely witch followed up her advantage.

“You thought perhaps that Hiero was as dead as the little beetle? but he lives again more beautifully in you!”

He looked startled up, his large eyes glittering blackly in the paleness of his face. Gnulemah, with the serenity of a victorious dis-

putant willing to make allowances, continued,—

“It may perhaps be different in that outside world you come from; but here death ends nothing, but makes its life new and strong.”

After a silence of some duration, Balder renewed his attack from another quarter.

“What should you think of one who put to death a thing you loved?”

She smiled, and shook her glowing pendants.

“Only God puts to death; and no one would hurt anything I loved!”

“What should you think of a man who killed another man?”

Gnumelah looked for a moment indignant and perplexed; then, to Balder’s great discomfiture, she laughed like a bird chorus!

“Why do you imagine what cannot be? Would you and Hiero kill each other? The grey owl kills little mice, but that is to eat them. Would you eat Hiero?”

“ Oh, don’t laugh, Gnulemah ! ” besought he.
“ I should kill him—not as animals kill one another, but from rage and hatred.”

“ Hatred ? ” repeated Gnulemah dislikingly ;
“ hatred—what is it ? ”

“ A passion of men’s hearts—the wish that evil may befall others. When the hatred is bitter enough, and the opportunity fair,—they kill ! ”

Gnulemah shuddered slightly, and looked displeased ; then she came near to Balder, and touched his shoulder persuasively.

“ Never think of such things, or talk of them. They are not real ! Could you ever hate any one, Balder ? or kill him if you did ? ”

With that glorious presence so near—her voice so close to his ear—how could he answer her ? His heart awoke and throbbed, and drove the tingling blood tumultuously through his veins. She saw the flush, and caught the passionate brilliancy of his eyes. Happy and afraid, she drew back, saying in haste,—

"You have not told me yet about the ring!"

That was not wisely said! Balder checked himself with a sudden, strong hand, and held still, his brows lowered down and his lips settled together, until his pulses were quiet, and his cheeks once more pale.

"I will tell you," he then said; "but you must first hear some other things." He hesitated, face to face with an analysis of murder. The position was at once stimulating and appalling. To dissect and reduce to its elements that grisly murder-demon that had once possessed his own soul, and whose writhings beneath the scalpel he would therefore feel as his own—here loomed a prospect large and terrible. Nevertheless, Balder took up the knife.

The white petal of an apple-blossom, parting from its calyx, came floating earthwards; but a breeze caught it and wafted it aloft. It sank again,—and was again arrested and borne sky-

wards. Finally, it disappeared over the cliff's edge.

"The weight that made it fall is of the earth," said Balder (both he and Gnulemah had been watching the petal's course); "the breeze that buoyed it up was from heaven. So it is with man. Were there no heavenly support, he would fall at once; but whether or not, he always tends to fall."

"It loved the air better than the earth!" objected Gnulemah.

"When man begins to fall, he becomes mad, and thinks he is not falling, but that earth is heaven, to which he is rising. But since earth is not infinite like heaven, he does not want others to enjoy it, lest his own pleasure be marred."

"How can that be?" said the reluctant Gnulemah. "What can make men so happy on earth as other men can?"

"Each wants all power for himself," rejoined

Balder, his voice growing stern as he pursued his theme. "They wish to hurl their fellows out of the world, even to annihilation. Every moment that this hatred is let grow in their hearts' garden, it spreads and strengthens, until it gains dominion over them, and enslaves them and makes them madder than before. Each will be above his rival—his enemy! he will be absolute master over him; and from that resolve is born murder!"

"Why do you tell Gnulemah this?" asked she, lifting her head like a majestic serpent. But she could not stop him now. His voice, measured at first, was now hurried by emotion.

"Murder comes next, and many a man—had fear or impotence not withheld him—would have done murder a thousand times! But sometimes the demon leaps up, and masters impotence and fear. The man is drunk with immeasurable selfishness, greater than the universe can satisfy, which would fain make

one victim after another until all the human race should be destroyed: and then would it turn against Heaven and God! Save for man's mortal frailty, the population of the earth would ever and anon be swept away by some giant murderer!

“Wickedness grows faster, the wickeder it is: he who has been wicked once will easily be so again—the more easily, as his crime was great. And even though—through all his mortal life—he sin no more, yet his drift is ever thitherwards! Only the air of heaven, breathing after death through his soul, can make him pure again.”

Balder was speaking out the gloom and terror that had been silently gathering within him since his fatal night. While he spoke, his mind expanded, and perceived things before unknown. As the reasons for condemnation multiplied, he did but push on the harder, striking at each tender spot in his own armour.

And as the day turned fatally against him, his face looked great and heroic, and his voice sounded almost triumphant.

Thus far he had but generalised: now he was come to his own plight. On several points he had been painfully in doubt:—whether he had done the deed in self-defence: whether he had meant to do it: whether it had not been a blind, mad accident, since swollen by fevered imagination into the likeness of wilful crime. But against such doubts arrayed itself the ineffaceable memory of that wild joy which had filled his soul when he felt his enemy in his power! Had the man survived, Balder might still have doubted; being dead, doubts were but cowardly sophistry.

But during the brief pause came a backward recoil of that impulse which had swept him on. All at once he was cold, and wavered. Gnulemah was sitting crouched together, her strange eyes fixed upon him. Had he duly considered

what effect all this might have on her? In aiming at his own life, might not the sword pass also through hers? Abruptly to behold sin—to find in the first man she had learned to know, the sinner—to be left with this burden on her untried soul—might not this ruin more than her earthly happiness? Did she still love him, such love could end only in misery; should she hate him, who, of all men, was bound to guard her defencelessness,—that would be misery indeed!

This misgiving, arresting his hand at the instant of delivering the final blow, almost discouraged the man. He glanced sullenly towards the edge of the cliff—only a few yards off: a new thought, jarred through his nerves! He got up and walked to the brink. Sixty feet to the rocky bottom.—

Gnulemah also rose slowly, and stretched herself like a tired child, sending a lazy tension through each noble limb and polished muscle.

She sighed—a deep breathing in and out—and pressed her hands against her temples.

“I was not made to understand such things. Tell me only what you have done and seen—I shall understand that. The things my love cannot reach only trouble me and make me sad.”

As she spoke she turned towards the house : and saw, or thought she saw, a man's figure stealing cautiously behind a clump of trees near the northern corner. Her listlessness fell from her like a mantle, and she watched, motionless !

Her last words had goaded Balder past bearing. As she turned away, his face grew grim and forlorn : he balanced with half-raised arms on the cliff's brink. The river slumbered bluely on below, peace was aloft in the sky, and joy in the trees and grass. But in the man were darkness and despair, and weariness of his God-given life !

The thing he meditated was not to be, how-

ever. Close in shore a little boat glided into view, beating up against stream. In the stern, the sheet in one hand and the tiller in the other, sat Balder's old friend Charon. He nodded up at the young man with a recognising grin. Then he laid his tiller-hand aside his brown cheek, and sang out—

“Look sharp, Cap'n! Davy Jones's got back! run foul of you!”

The next moment he put down the helm and ran out.

Meantime Balder, colouring with shame, had stepped back from his dangerous position: and the peril was past. But the paltering irresolution which he had at all points displayed urged him to do something to redeem himself—else was he lower than a criminal! He went towards Gnulemah—knelt down—caught her dress—he knew not what he did! In a blind dance of sentences he told her that he was a murderer—that all he had said aimed at him—

self—that with his own hands he had killed Hiero, whose body now lay at the bottom of the sea :—many frantic words he spoke. Thus, without art or rhetoric, roughly dragged forth by the head and ears, came his momentous confession into the world! Gnulemah had striven to check it more than once, but in vain.

But when he had come to the end, and stood tense and quivering as a bow-string whose arrow has just flown, these words reached him :—

“Hiero is not dead—he is there behind the trees!”

Stiffly he turned and stared, bewildered. Landscape—sky—Gnulemah—swam before his eyes in fragments, like images in troubled water. She put forth her rounded arm and tenderly supported him.

“Where?” he said at length.

“Near the house—there!” she pointed. Balder began to walk forward doubtfully. But

suddenly realising what lay before him, clearness and vigour ebbed back. He saw a figure turn the corner of the house. Then he leapt out and ran like a stag-hound!

XXIV.

UNCLE HIERO AT LAST.

IN a couple of minutes Balder was at the house, breathless: the figure was nowhere to be seen. He sprang across the broad portico, and hurried with sounding feet through the oaken hall. Should he go upstairs, or on to the conservatory? The sound of a softly shutting door from the latter direction decided him. The place looked as when he left it a half-hour before. Gnulemah's curtain had not been moved. The other door was closed; he ran up the steps between the granite sphinxes, and found it locked. Butting his shoulder against the panel with impatient force, the hinges broke from their rotten fastenings, and the door gave inwards. Balder stepped past it,

and found himself in the sombre lamp-lit interior of the granite temple.

He could discern but little ; the place seemed vast ; the corners were veiled in profound shadow. At the further end, a huge lamp was suspended, by a chain from the roof, over a triangular altar of black marble. The architecture of the room was strange and massive, as of Egyptian temples. Strong, dark colours met the eye on all sides ; in the panels of the walls and distant ceiling, fantastic devices showed obscurely forth. Nine mighty columns, of design like those in the doorway, were ranged along the walls, their capitals buried in the upward gloom.

Becoming used to the dusk, Balder now marked an array of colossal upright forms, alternating between the pillars. Their rough resemblance to human figures drew him towards one of them : it was an Egyptian sarcophagus covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions,

and probably holding an immemorial mass of spiced flesh and rags. These silent relics of a prehistoric past seemed to be the only company present. In view of his uncle's well-known tastes, the nephew was not unprepared to meet these gentry.

But he was come to seek the living, not the dead. The figure that he had seen outside must be within these four walls, there being no other visible outlet besides the door through which Balder had entered. Was old Hiero Glyphic lurking in one of these darksome corners, or behind some thickset column? The young man looked about him as sharply as he could, but nothing moved except the shadows thrown by the lamp, which was vibrating pendulum-like on its long chain.

He approached this lamp, his steps echoing on the floor of polished granite. What had set the thing swinging? It had a leisurely elliptical motion, as from a moderate push

sideways. The lamp was wrought in bronze, antique of fashion and ornament. It had capacity for gallons of oil, and would burn for weeks without refilling. The altar beneath was a plain black marble prism, highly polished, resting upon a round base of alabaster. A handful of ashes crowned its top. Between the altar and the wall intervened a space of about seven feet.

The glare of the lamp had blinded Balder to what was beyond ; but, on stepping round it, he was confronted by an old-fashioned upright clock, such as were in vogue upon staircase-landings and in entrance-halls, a hundred years ago. With its broad, white dial-plate, high shoulders, and dark mahogany case, it looked not unlike a tall, flat-featured man, holding himself stiffly erect. But whether man or clock, it was lifeless ; the hands were motionless—there was no sound of human or mechanical heart-beat within : though Balder held his yet panting

breath to listen ! Was it Time's coffin, wherein his corpse had lain for many a silent year—only that years must stand still without Time to drive them on ! But this still hall had no part in the moving world—knew naught of life and change, day and night. Here dwelt a moveless present—a present at once past and to come, yet never here ! No wonder the mummies felt at home ! though even they could only partially appreciate the situation.

The clock was fastened against the wall. The longer Balder gazed at it, the more human-like did it appear. Its face was ornamented with coloured pictures of astronomical processes, sufficiently resembling a set of shadowy features, of a depressed and insignificant type. The mahogany case served for a close-fitting brown surtout, buttoned to the chin. The slow vibration of the lamp produced on the countenance the similitude of a periodically recurring grimace.

Not only did the clock look human, but—or so Balder fancied—it bore a grotesque and extravagant likeness to a certain elderly relative of his, whose portrait he had carried in an inner pocket of his haversack—now in Long Island Sound. It reminded him, in a word, of poor old Uncle Hiero, whom he had—no, no!—who was alive and well, and was perhaps even now observing his dear nephew's perplexity, and maliciously chuckling over it!

The young man glanced uneasily over his shoulder, but all beyond the lamp was a gloomy blank. The same moment he trod upon some tough, thick substance, which yielded beneath his foot! Thoroughly startled, he jumped back. It lay near the foot of the clock. He stooped, picked it up, and held in his hands the well-known haversack, from which he had parted on board the "Empire State." How his heart beat as he examined it! It was stained and whitened with salt

water, and the strap was broken in two. Opening it, there were his toilet articles and all his other treasures—even the cherished miniature,—not much the worse for their wetting. So there could no longer be any doubt that his uncle had come back. Where was he?

That queer fancy about the clock stuck in Balder's head! Some how or other it must be connected with Doctor Glyphic. The haversack, dropped at its foot, was direct evidence. Yet, did ever wise man harbour notion so irrational! Its manifest absurdity was the only excuse for thinking it.

With no declared object in view, Balder grasped the clock by its high shoulders and shook it, but with no result. He next struck the mahogany smartly with clenched fist: the blow sounded—not hollow, but close and muffled! The case must be either solid, or filled with something that deadened the echo. Filled with

what ? who would think of putting anything in a clock ? It was big enough, to be sure, to hold a man, if he could find a way to get in !

The sequence of thoughts is often obscure, but Balder's next idea, wild as it was, could hardly be called incoherent. A man might conceivably be in the clock ; perhaps a man was in it ; but if so, the man could be none other than Doctor Hiero Glyphic !

This conclusion once imagined, suspense was unendurable. The logician tried to open the front of the case, but it was riveted fast. With impetuous fingers he then wrenched at the disc. With a sound like a rusty screech, it came off in his hands. The lamp so flickered that Balder feared it was going out, and even at this epoch had to look round to reassure himself. Meanwhile, a pungent, but not unpleasant odour saluted his nostrils : he turned back to the clock—a clock no longer ! and beheld the unmistakeable linea-

ments of his worthy uncle peeping forth with half-shut eyes from the place where the dial-plate had been.

The nephew dropped the dial-plate, and it was shattered on the granite floor. He was badly frightened. There was no delusion about the face—it was a sufficiently peculiar one; and the miniature portrait, though doing the Doctor's beauty at least justice, was accurate enough to identify him by. This was no unsubstantial apparition—no brain phantom, to waver and vanish, leaving only an uncomfortable doubt whether it had been at all. Stolid, undeniable matter it was, peering phlegmatically between wrinkled eyelids.

But admitting that now, at last, we have lighted upon the genuine and authentic Doctor Glyphic, why should the sight of him so oddly affect Balder Helwyse, whose avowed object in pulling off the dial-plate had been to justify a suspicion that Uncle Hiero was behind it?

Why, moreover, did the young man not address his relative, congratulating himself upon their meeting, and rallying the old gentleman on his attempt to escape his nephew's affectionate solicitude? There had, indeed, been a misunderstanding at their last encounter, and Balder had so far forgotten himself as to throw Hiero into the water; but it was the part of good-breeding, as well as of Christianity, to forget such errors, and heal the bruise with an extra application of balsamic verbiage.

Why so speechless, Balder? Do you wait for your host to speak first? Nay, never stand on ceremony. He is an eccentric recluse, unused to the ways of society, while a man of the world like you has at his tongue's tip a score of phrases just suited to the occasion. Speak up, therefore, in your most genial tone, and tell the Doctor how glad you are to find him in such wonderful preservation! Put him at his ease by feigning that his position appears

to you the most natural in the world—just what befits a gentleman of his years and honours! Flatter him, if only from self-interest, for he has a deep pocket, and may be induced to let you put a hand in it.

Not a word in response to all this eloquence, Balder? Positively your behaviour appears rather curmudgeonly than heroic! You stand gazing at your relative with almost as much fixedness as he returns your stare, withal. There is something odd about this.

What is that pungent odour? Is the Doctor a dandy, that he should use perfumes? And where did he get so peculiar a scent as this? It is commonly in vogue only at that particular toilet which no man ever performed for himself, but which never needs to be done twice—a kind of toilet, by the way, especially prevalent amongst the ancient Egyptians. Since, then, Doctor Glyphic is so ardent an Egyptologist, perhaps we have hit upon the secret of his

remarkable odoriferousness. But to shut one's self up in a box that looks so uncommonly like a coffin,—is not that carrying the antiquarian whim a trifle too far?

This face of his—one fancies there is a curiously dry look about it! The unnatural yellow skin resembles a piece of good-for-nothing wrinkled parchment. The lips partake of the prevailing sallow tint, and the mouth hangs a little awry. From the cloth in which the head is so elaborately bandaged up strays forth, here and there, an arid lock of hair. The lack of united expression in his features produces an effect seldom observable in a living face. The eyes are lustreless, and densely black; or possibly (the suspicion is a startling one) we are looking into empty eye-sockets! No eyes, no expression, parchment skin, swathed head, odour of myrrh and cassia, and, dominating all, this ghastly immobility! Has Doctor Glyphic even now escaped, leaving us to waste time

and sentiment over some worn-out disguise of his? Nay, if he be not here, we need not seek him further. Having forsaken this, he can attain no other earthly hiding-place. We must pause here, and believe, either that this dry time-husk is the very last of poor Hiero, or that a living being which once bore his name has vanished inward from our reach, and now treads a more real earth than any that time and space are sovereign over.—

Balder (whose perceptions were unlimited by artistic conditions) probably needed no second glance to assure him that his uncle was a mummy of many years' standing. But no effort of mental gymnastics could explain him the fact. Were this real, then was his steam-boat adventure a dream, the revelation of the ring a delusion, and his water-stained haversack a phantom. He wandered clueless in a maze of mystery. Nor was this the first paradox he had encountered since overleaping the brick

wall. He began to question whether supernaturalism had not been too hastily dismissed by lovers of wisdom!

Thus do the actors in the play of life plod from one to another scene, nor once rise to a height whence a glance might survey past and future. Memory and prophecy are twin sisters—nay, they are essentially one muse, whom mankind worships on this side and slights on that. This is well, for had she but one aspect, the world would be either too confident or too helpless. But in reviewing a life, one is apt to make less than due allowance for the helplessness. Thus it is no prejudice to Balder's intellectual acumen that he failed for a moment to penetrate the thin disguises of events, and to perceive relations obvious to the comprehensive view of history. We will take advantage of his bewildered pause to draw attention to some matters heretofore neglected.

XXV.

THE HAPPINESS OF MAN.

WHEN Manetho—who shall no longer perplex us with his theft of a worthier man's name—Manetho, feeling himself worsted in the brief strenuous struggle, tried to drag his antagonist overboard with him. But his convulsive fingers seized only the leathern strap of the haversack. Balder—his Berserker fury at white heat—flung the man with such terrible strength as drove him headlong over the taffrail like a billet of wood, the stout strap snapping like thread!

Manetho struck the water in sorrow plight, breathless, bruised, half-strangled. He sank to a chilly depth, but carried his wits down with him, and these brought him up again alive, however exhausted. Too weak to swim, he

yet had strength left to keep afloat. But for the collision, he had drowned, after all !

The cool salt bath presently helped him to a little energy, and by the time the steamer was under way, he could think of striking out. It was with no small relief that he heard near voices sounding through the black fog. Partly by dint of feeble struggles, partly shouldered on by waves,—ready to save as to drown him,—he managed to accomplish the short distance to the schooner. With all his might he shouted for a rope, and amidst much yo-heave-ho-ing, cursing, and astonishment, was at length hauled aboard, the haversack in his grasp.

The skipper and his crew were kind to him ; for men still have compassion upon one another, and give succour according to the need of the moment—not to the balance of good and evil in the sufferer. The wind freshened, an impromptu bowsprit was rigged, and the “ Resurrection ” limped towards New York. Manetho’s

partial stupor was relieved by hot grog and the cook's stove. He gave no further account of himself than that he had fallen overboard at the moment of collision ; adding a request to be landed in New York, since he had left some valuable luggage on the steamer.

The skipper gave the stranger his own bunk, the off-watch turned in, and Manetho was left to himself. He lay for a long while thinking over what had happened. Bewitched by the spell of night, he had spoken to Helwyse things never before distinctly stated even to his own mind. The subtle, perverse devil who had discoursed so freely to his unknown hearer, had never been so unreserved to Manetho's private ear ; and the devilish utterances had stirred up the latter not much less than the former.

Both men had been wrought, according to their diverse natures, to the pitch of frenzy. But similar crazy seizures had been incident to the Egyptian from boyhood. He had anxiously

watched against them, and contrived various means to their mitigation : the most successful being the music of his violin—which he seldom let beyond his reach. Yet, again and again would the fit steal a march on him. Hence, in part, his retired way of life, varied only by the brief journeys demanded by the two-fold craving—for gambling and for news of Thor, who figured in his morbid imagination as the enemy of his soul !

The news never came, but all the more brooded Manetho over his hatred, and his fancied wrongs. His mind had never been entirely sound, and years tinged it more and more deeply with insanity. His philosophy of life—obscure indeed if tried by sane standards,—emits a dusky glimmer when read by this. He would creep through miles of subterranean passages to achieve an end, which one glance above ground would have argued vain !

Lying on the bunk in the close cabin, lighted

by a dirty lantern pendant from the roof, the Reverend Manetho began to fear that not his worst misfortune was the having been thrown overboard. At the moment when madness was smouldering to a blaze within him, the lantern flash had revealed to him the face which, for twenty years, he had seen in visions. Often had he rehearsed this meeting, varying his imaginary behaviour to suit all conceivable moods and attitudes of his enemy—but never thinking to provide for perversity in himself! So far from veiling his designs with the soft-voiced cunning of his oriental nature, he had been a wild beast! A misgiving haunted him, moreover, that he had babbled something in the false security of darkness, which might give Helwyse a clue to his secret.

But here Manetho asked himself a question that might have suggested itself before. Was it really his enemy, Thor Helwyse, whose face he had seen? or only some likeness of him?

Thor must be threescore years old by this—the senior by ten years of Manetho himself; while his late antagonist had the strength and aspect of half that age. Yet how could he be mistaken in the face which had haunted him during more than the third part of his lifetime? He had recognised it on the instant!

“I will ask the haversack!” said he. He sat up, and bracing himself against the roll of the vessel, he opened the bag and carefully examined its contents. In an inner pocket he found an old letter of Dr Glyphic’s to Thor; another from Thor to his son, dated three years back; and finally a diary kept by Balder Helwyse, which gave Manetho all the information he wanted.

He had so arranged matters that at Glyphic’s death he had got the control of the money into his own hands, and had made such diligent use of it that enough was not now left to pay for his prosecution as a thief and forger. In fact, had

Balder delayed his return another year, he would have found the enchanted castle in possession of the auctioneer : and as to the fate of its inhabitants, one does not like to speculate !

Having read the papers, Manetho replaced them, and next pulled out the miniature of Doctor Glyphic. He studied this for a long time. It was the portrait of a man to whom—so long as their earthly relations had continued—the Egyptian renegade had been faithful. Perhaps there was some secret germ of excellence in poor Hiero, unsuspected by the rest of the world, but revealed to Manetho, from whom in turn it had drawn the best virtues that his life had to show. Doctor Glyphic had never been a comfortable companion ; but Manetho was always patient and honest with him. This integrity and forbearance were the more remarkable, since the Doctor seldom acknowledged a kindness, and knew so little of business that he

might have been robbed of his fortune at any moment with impunity.

Either from physical exhaustion or for some worthier reason, the Egyptian cried over this miniature, as an affectionate girl might have cried over the portrait of her dead lover. For a time he was all tears and softness. His emotion had not the convulsiveness which, with men of his age, is apt to accompany the exhibition of much feeling; he wept with feminine fluency, nor did his tearfulness seem out of character. There was a great deal of the woman in him.

Having wept his fill, he tenderly wiped his eyes, and returned the picture to its receptacle; and first assuring himself that nothing else was concealed in the haversack, he shut it up and resumed his meditations.

It was the son, then, whom he had met,—and Thor was dead. Dead!—that was a hard fact for Manetho to swallow. His enemy had escaped him—was dead! Through all the

years of waiting, Manetho had not anticipated this. How should Thor die before revenge had been wreaked upon him?—But he was dead!

By degrees, however, his mind began to adjust itself to the situation. The son, at all events, was left him. He cuddled the thought, whispering to himself and slyly smiling. Did not the father live again in the son? he would lose nothing, therefore—not lose but gain! The seeming loss was a blessing in disguise. The son—young, handsome, hot of blood! Already new schemes began to take shape in the Egyptian's brain. His dear revenge!—it should not starve, but feed on the fat of the land,—yea, be drunk with strong wine.

He lay hugging himself, his long narrow eyes gleaming, his full lips working together. He was revolving a devilish project—the flintiest criminal might have shuddered at it. But there was nothing flinty nor unfeeling about

Manetho. His emotions were alert and moist, his smile came and went, his heart beat full; he was now the girl listening to her lover's first passionate declaration!

He had gathered from Balder's diary that the young man was in search of his uncle, and had been on his way to the house at the time of their encounter. There was a chance that this unlucky episode might frighten him away. He no doubt supposed himself guilty of manslaughter at least; how gladly would the clergyman have re-assured him! And indeed there was no resentment in Manetho's heart because of his rough usage at Balder's hands. His purposes lay too deep to influence shallower moods. He presented a curious mixture of easy forgiveness and unmitigable malice.

The only other anxiety besetting him arose from the loss of the ring. He looked upon it as a talisman of excellent virtue, and moreover perceived that in case Balder should pick it up,

it might become the means of identifying its owner and obstructing his plans.—But these were mere contingencies. The probability was that young Helwyse would ultimately appear at his uncle's house, and would there be ensnared in the seductive meshes of Manetho's web. The ring was most likely at the bottom of the Sound. So, smiling his subtle feminine smile, the Egyptian fell asleep, to dream of the cordial welcome he would give his expected guest.

Towards midnight of the same day he approaches the house by way of the winding avenue, his violin-case safe in hand. He steps out joyfully beneath the wide-spread minuet of twinkling stars. On his way he comes to a moss-grown bench at the foot of a mighty elm—the bench on which he sat with Helen during the stirring moments of their last interview. Manetho's soul overflows to-night with flattering hopes, and he has spare emotion for any

demand. He drops on his knees beside this decayed old bench, and kisses it twice or thrice with tender vehemence ; stretches out his arms to embrace the air, and ripples forth a half-dozen sentences—pleading, insinuating, passionate. He can love her again as much as ever, now that the wrong done him is on the eve of requital !

But his mood is no less fickle than melting. Already he is up and away, almost dancing along the shadowed romantic tree-aisle, his eyes glistening black in the star-light—no longer with a lover's luxurious sorrow, but with the happy anticipation of an artless child, promised a holiday and playthings. So lightsome and expansive is Manetho's heart, the hollow hemisphere of heaven seems none too roomy for it !

Evil as well as good knows its moments of bliss—its hours ! Hell is the heaven of devils, and they want no better. Often do the wages of sin come laden with a seeming blessing that

those of virtue lack. The sinner looks upon Satan's face, and it is to him as the face of God!

But from the womb of this grim truth is born a noble consolation. Were hell mere torment, and joy in heaven only, where were the good man's merit? Only when the choice lies between two heavens—the selfish and the unselfish—is the battle worthy the fighting! No human soul dies from earth that attains not heaven—that heaven which the heart chiefly sought while in this world; and herefrom is the genesis of virtue. Sin brings its self-inflicted penalties there as here; but hell is still the happiness of man, heaven of God.—

Reaching the house, Manetho passed through the open door, crossed the hall with his customary noiselessness, and entered the conservatory. Despite the darkness, he was at once aware of the motionless group beneath the palm-trees. A stranger in the house was some-

thing so unprecedented, that he could not repress a throb of alarm. Nurse looked up and beckoned him. Drawing near, he heard the long deep breathing of the sleeper. With a sudden fore-glimpse of the truth, he knelt down, and bent over the upturned countenance.

Though the beard was close-shaven and the hair cropped short, there could be no doubt about the face. His guest had come before him, and was lying defenceless at his feet; but Manetho harboured no thought of violence. He pressed his slender hands together with an impulse of sympathy. "Poor fellow!" he whispered, "how he has suffered! How the horror of blood-guiltiness must have tortured him! The noble Helwyse hair—all gone! Too dear a price to pay for the mere sacrifice of a human life! And pain and all might have been spared him—poor fellow! poor fellow!" Manetho lacked but little of shedding true tears over the evidence of his dearest foe's useless dread and

anguish. Did he wish Balder to bring undulled nerves to his own torture-chamber?

His lament over, Manetho turned to Nurse for such information regarding the guest's arrival and behaviour as she might have to communicate. Of his own affair with Balder he made no mention. The conversation was carried on by signs, according to a code long since grown up between the two. When the tale was told, Nurse was despatched to make ready Helen's room for the new comer, and thither did the two laboriously bear him, and laid him, still sleeping, on his mother's bed.

XXVI.

MUSIC AND MADNESS.

BEFORE leaving Balder to his repose, Manetho paused to regain his breath, and to throw a glance round the room. It was a place he seldom visited. He had seen Helen's dead body lie on that bed, and the sight had bred in him an animosity against the chamber and everything it contained. After Dr Glyphic's death he had gratified this feeling in a characteristic manner. Possessing a genius for drawing second only to that for music, he had exercised it on the walls of the room, originally modelled and tinted to represent a robin's egg. He mixed his colours with the bitter distillations of his heart, and created the beautiful but ill-omened vision which long afterwards so disquieted Balder.—

From the chamber he repaired to the kitchen, which was in some respects the most attractive place in the house. The smoky ceiling, the cavernous cupboards opening into the walls, the staunch dressers, polished by use and mottled with many an ancient stain, the great black range which would have cooked a meal for a troop of men-at-arms—all spoke of homely human comfort. Nurse had Manetho's meal ready for him, and having set it out on the table, she retired to her position in the chimney-corner. The Egyptian's spare body was ordinarily nourished with little more than goes to the support of an Arab, and Nurse's monotonous life must have been unfavourable to large appetite. As for Gnulemah—although young women are said to thrive and grow beautiful on a diet of morning dew, noon-day sunshine, and evening mist—it seems quite likely that she ate no less than the health and activity of a Diana might naturally require.

Manetho made a gleeful repast, and Nurse looked on from her corner, externally as unattractive-looking a woman as one would wish to see. Nevertheless, had she been made as some clocks are, with a plate of glass over her inner movements, she would have monopolised the clergyman's attention and impaired his appetite. He did not sit down to the table, but took up one viand after another, and ate as he walked to and fro the floor. Supper over, he crowned it with an unheard-of excess,—for Manetho was commonly a very temperate man. He brought from a cupboard a dusty bottle of priceless wine, which had once enriched the cellar of a king of Spain. Drawing the cork, he poured some of the golden liquor into a slender glass, while the spiritual aroma flowed invisible along the air, visiting every darksome nook, and even saluting Nurse, who had long been a stranger to any such delicate attention.

Manetho filled two glasses, and then beckoned

Nurse to come from her corner, and drink with him. Forth she hobbled accordingly, looking more than usually ugly by reason of her surprise and embarrassment at the unexpected summons. Manetho, on the other hand, seemed to have cast aside his years, and looked once more the graceful, sinuous, courteous youth, whose long black eyes had, long ago, seen Salome's heart. With an elegant gesture he handed her the brimming wine-glass, accompanying it with a smile which well-nigh shook it from between her fingers. He took up his own glass, and said—

“I seldom drink wine, Nurse—never, unless a lady joins me! Once I drank with her whose chamber our guest now occupies; and once with another——” Manetho paused. “I never speak her name, Nurse; but we loved each other. I did not treat her well!” he murmured with a sigh, tears in his eyes. “Were she here to-night, at her feet would I sue for pardon—

the renewal of our love. By my soul!" he cried, suddenly, "I had thought to drink a far different toast; but let this glass be drained to the memory of the sweet moments she and I have known together! Drink!"

He tossed off the wine. But poor Nurse, strangely agitated, dropped hers on the floor; the precious liquor was spilled, and the glass shivered. She gazed beseechingly at Manetho. Could he not penetrate that mask to the face behind it? Is flesh so miserably opaque, that no spark of the inwardly burning soul can make itself felt or seen without? Manetho saw only the broken glass and its wasted contents!

"You are as clumsy as you are ugly!" said he. "Go back to your corner. I must converse with my violin."

She returned heavily to her place, feeling the darker and colder because that wine had been spilled before she could raise it to her lips. One taste, she fancied, might have begun a

transformation in her life! But we know not the weight of the chains we lay upon our limbs.

The Egyptian's buoyant humour had dismissed the whole matter in another moment. He opened his violin-case, lovingly caressing the instrument as he took it out. Then he tucked it fondly under his chin, and resumed his walking. The delicately potent wine warbled through his nerves, and tinted memory with imagination.

The bow, traversing the strings, drew forth from them a sweet and plaintive note, like the tender remonstrance of a neglected friend. No language says so much in so short space as music, nor will, till we banish those dead bones, consonants, and adopt the pure vowel speech of infants and angels.

"Ay, long have we been apart, my beloved one, and much have I needed thee!" murmured Manetho. "I yearned for thy soothing and refreshing voice; yea, death walked near

me, because thou, my preserver, wast not by to guard me. But, rejoice! all is again well with us—the hour of our triumph is near!”

The fine instrument responded, carolling forth an exquisite pæan—an ascending scale, mounting to a breathless ecstasy, and falling in slower melody along gliding waves of fortunate sound. The player drank each perfect note, till his pulses beat in unison with the rhythm. His violin and he were wedded lovers since his youth, nor had discord ever come between them.

“Two little children weaving flower-chains for each other in the grass. I said, ‘The one that first comes to me shall be mine!’ And the little maiden arose, leaving her brother among the flowers. So one was taken and the other left. But, behold! the brother has come, to play with his sister once more!”

Again the music—a divine philosopher’s stone—touched the theme into fine-spun

golden harmony. The dusky kitchen, with its one dull lamp glimmering on the table, broadened with marble floors, and sprang aloft in airy arches! Twinkling stars hung between the columns, burning with a fragrance like flowers. It was a summer morning, just before sunrise. The clear faces of children peeped from violet-strewn recesses where they had passed the night; and, as their sweet eyes met, they shouted for joy, and ran to embrace one another.

“Oh! my beloved,” softly burst forth the Egyptian, “how blessed are we to-night!” He touched the strings to a measured tune, following with a minuet-step up and down the floor. A fantastic spectacle! for as he passed and repassed the lamp, an elastic shadow crept noiselessly behind him, dodged beneath his feet, and anon outstretched itself like a sudden pit yawning before him. “This night repays the dreary years that lie behind. How have I out-

lasted them? What had I fallen on the very threshold of requital?—all I had hoped and laboured for, a failure!”

Here paused the tune and the dance, and arose a weird dirge of compassion over what might have been! So moving was it, the player himself was melted. His dark nature showed its fairest side—sensitive refinement, grace of expression, flowing ease of manner. Quick was he in fancy, emotional, soft and strong, gentle and fiery. In this hour he bloomed, like some night-flowering plant, of perfume sweet but poisonous. This was Manetho’s apogee!

Again his humour changed, and he became playful and frivolous. Had old Nurse in the corner been a little more personable, he might have caught her round the waist, and forced her to tread a wild measure with him. But this unfolding of his faculties in the shower of good fortune had refined his æsthetic suscepti-

bility. The withered disfigured woman was no partner for him !

She sat, following with the intentness of her single eye, his every motion, her head swaying in unconscious sympathy. Although her body sat so stiff and awkward in the chimney-seat, her spirit, inspired with the grace of love, was dancing with Manetho's. But the body kept its place, knowing that ere long he too must come to rest. In the light of a vivid recollection, the long tract between fades and foreshortens, till only the Then and the Now are notable. However, the light will pale, the dusty miles outstretch their length once more, and the pilgrim find himself wearier than ever.

But meanwhile the clergyman floats hither and thither like a wreath of black smoke blown about by a draught of air. One might have expected to see him all at once vanish up the wide-mouthed chimney. The music seems to emanate less from the instrument than from the

player; it interprets and colours every motion and expression. His chanting and his playing answer and supplement each other, like strophe and antistrophe.

“Let me tell thee why I rejoice, that thy sympathy may increase my joy!

“A beautiful woman, young, a fountain of fresh life, an ivory vase filled with earthly flowers. The eye that gazes on her form is taken captive; yea, her face intoxicates the senses. But she is poisonous, a queen of death, and her feet walk towards destruction!

“Supple and strong is she as the serpent, quick and graceful as the panther. Food has she for nourishment, for the warming of the blood; exercises for the body, to keep her healthful and fair. Her triumph is in the flesh—she finds it perfect. The flesh she deems divine—the earth, a heaven!

“Books, the world of men,—she knows not: sees in herself Creation's cause and centre: in

God, but the myriad reflex of her beauty. Self is her God, whom she worships in thunder and lightning, in sun and stars, in fire and water. Dreaming and waking are alike real to her: she knows not to divide truth from falsehood.

“Whom should she thank for health, for life and birth? She is born of the fire that burns in her own bosom. To her is nothing lawful nor unlawful. No tie binds her soul to salvation. A fair ship is she, but rudderless, and the wind blows on the rocks. Let God save her if He will—and can!”

The inspiration of the Arab improvisatore would have seemed tame beside Manetho's nervous exaltation. Save for the tingling satire of the violin-strings, his rhapsody might easily have lapsed to madness. From this point, however, the rapture somewhat abated, and he began to descend towards prose, his music clothing him downwards.

“As for me I have bowed down before her, pampering her insolent majesty, preserving her poison to rankle first in her father’s heart. Of him, death robbed me; but the son—the brother is left. Even death spared brother and sister to each other!

“A handsome man! worthy to stand by her. Never fairer couple sprang from one stem. They love each other—and shall love!—more than ever brother and sister loved before. But they shall be bound by a tie so close, that the mere tie of blood hangs loose beside it! Then shall night come down on them—a night no rising sun shall ever chase away. In that darkness will I speak—”

This devilish monologue ended abruptly here. The faithful instrument, whose responsive sympathy had never failed him, jarringly snapped a string! A sting of anguish pricked through Manetho’s every nerve. His fictitious buoyancy evaporated like steam,—he barely made

shift to totter to a chair. Laying the violin with trembling hands on the table, his head dropped on his arms beside it: and there was a long, feverish silence.

At length he raised his haggard face, and supporting it upon his hands, he gazed at the figure in the chimney-corner; and began, in a tone sullen and devoid of animation as November rain,—

“Why did you force yourself upon me?—not for Gnulemah’s sake, I think. Not for money,—you have had none. Not for love of me either, I fancy,—grisly harpy!

“Once I suspected you of being a spy. You walked among pitfalls then! But what spy would sit for eighteen years without speech or movement? You have been useful too. No one could have filled your place—with your one eye and dumb mouth!

“Did you hate Thor? were you my secretly against him?—But how could you fathom

my purposes enough even to help me? And what wrong has he done you, terrible enough for such revenge as mine? What human being, except Manetho, could hold an unwavering purpose so many years? Have you never pitied, or relented?—Sometimes I have almost wavered myself!

“What name and history have you buried, and never shown me? Why have you spent your dumb life in this seclusion? You are a mystery—yet a mystery of my own making! I might as wisely dissect my violin to find where lurks the music. A mass of wood and strings,—the music is from me!

“Have you a thought of preventing the scheme I spoke of to-night?” Thé Egyptian leaned far across the table, the better to scrutinise the unanswering woman’s face. Her eye met his with a steady intelligence that disconcerted him.

“Are you a woman?” he muttered, drawing

back, "and have you no pity on the children whom you nursed in their infancy?—not any pity! as implacable—almost more implacable than I? But think of her beauty and innocence—for is she not innocent as yet? Would you see her for ever ruined—and stretch forth no saving hand?" Nurse moved her head up and down, as in slow deliberate assent. Manetho, beholding the reflection in her of his own moral deformity, was filled with abhorrence!

"More hideous within than without—you demon! come to haunt me and make me wicked as yourself. It was you snapped the chord of my music—that better spirit which had till then saved me from your spells! My evil genius! I know you now, though never until this moment."

This madman was not the first sinner who, happening to catch an outside glimpse of his interior grime, has tried to cheat his scared

conscience by an outcry of "Devil!—devil!" Is there not a touch of pathos in the vanity of the situation? For, the cry is in part sincere; no man can be so wholly evil while in this world, as quite to divorce the better angel from from his soul. But alas! for the poor righteous indignation.

XXVII.

PEACE AND GOODWILL.

BALDER HELWYSE, dumfounded before the revelation of the clock, might have stared himself into imbecility, had not he heard his name spoken in sweet human music, and, turning, beheld Gnulemah peeping through the doorway down the hall.

There was no great distance between them, yet she seemed immeasurable spaces away. Against the bright background of the conservatory, her form stood dark, the outlines softened by semi-transparent edges of drapery. But the dull red lamplight lit duskily up the folds of her robe, her golden ornaments, and the black tarns her eyes. She appeared to waver between the light of heaven, and the lurid gloom of heaven's opposite.

Balder came hastily towards her, waving her back. He was superstitiously anxious that she should return unshadowed to the clear outer sunshine, instead of joining him in this tomb of dead bones and darkness. Darkness might indeed befriend his own imperfections; but should Gnulemah be dimmed to soothe his vanity?

Such emblematic fancies are common to lovers, whose ideal passion tends always to symbolism. But to those who have never loved, it will be enough to say that the young man felt an instinctive desire to spare Gnulemah the ugly spectacle in the clock, and was perhaps not unwilling to escape from it himself!

She awaited him, in the bright doorway, like an angel come to lead him to a better world. "Do not leave me any more!" she said, putting her hand in his. "You did not do the thing you thought. Let us be together, and dream no more such sadness!"

"Is her innocence strong enough to protect her against that sinful deluge of confession I poured out upon her?" thought Helwyse, glancing at her face. "Has it fallen from her harmless, like water from a bird's breast? And am I after all no murderer!"

Doubt nor accusation were in her eyes, but soft feminine faith. Her eyes—rather than have lost the deep intelligence of their dark light, Balder would have consented to blotting from heaven its host of stars! Through them shone on him—not justice; but the divine injustice of woman's love! That wondrous bond, more subtile than light, and more enduring than adamant, had leagued her to him. Consecrated by the blessing of her trust, he must not dare distrust himself. If the past were blindly wrong, she was the God-given clue to guide him right.

An unspeakable tenderness melted them both—him for what he received, her for what

she gave. The rich bud of their love bloomed at once in full fragrant stateliness. Their hearts—left unprotected by their out-opened arms—demanded shelter; and found it in nestling on each other. Heaven touched earth in the tremulous, fiery calm of their meeting lips—magnets whose currents flowed from the mysterious poles of humanity.

At such moments—the happiest life counts but few—angels draw near, but veil their happy eyes. Spirits of evil grind their teeth and frown; and, for one awful instant, perceive their own deformity!

Before yet that dear embrace had lasted an eternity, the man felt the woman shiver in his arms. The celestial heights and spaces dwindled, the angelic music faded. Heaven rolled back and left them alone on earth. Manetho stood on the threshold between the sphinxes, wearing such a smile as God has never doomed us to see on a child's face!

To few men comes the opportunity of facing in this life those whom they believed they had put out of it. One might expect the palpable assurance of the victim's survival would electrify the fancied murderer. But to Balder's mind, his personal responsibility could not be thus lightened; and any emotion of selfish relief was therefore denied him. On the other hand, such inferences as he had been able to draw from things seen and heard, were not to Manetho's advantage. While he could not but rejoice to have been spared actually hurrying a soul from the life of freewill to an unchangeable eternity,—yet his dominant instinct was to man himself for the hostile issues still to arise. He looked at the being through whom his own life had received so dark a stain, with stern keen eyes.

Gnulemah remained within the circle of her lover's arm. She seemed but little interested in Manetho's appearance, save in so far as he

invaded the sanctity of her new immortal privilege. She had never known anxiety on his account; he had never appealed to her feeling for himself. If she loved him, it was with an affection unconscious because untried. She had shivered in Balder's embrace at the moment of the Egyptian's presence, but before having set eyes on him. Had the nearness of his discordant spirit,—his familiar face unseen—made her conscious of an evil emanation from him, else unperceived?

Manetho, to do him justice, assumed anything but a hostile attitude. His pleasure at seeing the pair so well-affected towards each other, was plainly manifested. He clasped his hands together; then extended them with a gesture of benediction and greeting, and came forward. His swarthy face, narrowing from brow to chin,—if it could not be frank and hearty, at least expressed a friendliness which it had been ungracious to mistrust.

“Yes, son of Thor, I live!” God has been merciful to both of us. Let one who knew your father, take your hand. Believe, that whatever I have felt for him, I now feel for you,—and more!”

The speaker had cast aside the fashionable clothes which he was in the habit of wearing during his journeys abroad, probably with a view to guard against being conspicuous,—and was clad in antique priestly costume. A curiously figured and embroidered robe fell to his feet, and was confined at the waist by a long girdle, which also passed round his shoulders, after the manner of a Jewish ephod. It invested him with a dignity of presence such as ordinary garments would not have suggested. This, combined with the unexpectedly pacific tone of his address (its somewhat fantastic formality suiting well with that of his appearance) were not without effect on Balder. He gave his hand with some cordiality.

“Yours, also?” continued the other, addressing Gnulemah with an involuntary deference that surprised her lover. She complied, as a princess to her subject. This incident seemed to indicate their position relatively to each other. Had the wily Egyptian played the slave so well, as finally in good earnest to have become one?

The three stood for a moment joined in a circle, through which what incongruous passions were circulating! But Gnulemah soon withdrew the hand held by Manetho, and sent it to seek the one clasped by Balder. The priest turned cold, and stepped back; and, after an appearance of mental struggle, said huskily—

“Hiero is forgotten; you are all for the stranger!”

“You never told me who lived beyond the wall,” returned Gnulemah, with simple dignity; and added, “You are no less to me than before, but Balder is—my love!” The last words

came shyly from her lips, and she swayed gently, like a noble tree, towards him she named.

Manetho's lips worked against each other, and his body twitched. He was learning the difference between theory and practice—dream and fact. His subtle schemes had been dramas enacted by variations of himself. No allowance had been made for the working of spirit on spirit; even his special part had been designed too narrowly, with but a single governing emotion, whereas he already found himself assailed by an anarchal host of them.

“Gnulemah!” he cried at length, “my study—my thought—my purpose—body of my hopes and prayers!” He knelt and bowed himself at her feet, in the Oriental posture of worship, and went on with rising passion—“My secrets have bloomed in thy beauty—been music in thy voice—darkened in thine eyes! O, my flower—fascinating, terrible!—the time is ripe for the

gathering, for the smelling of the perfume, for the kissing of the petals! I must yield thee up, O my idol! but in thy hand are my life and my reason—yea, Gnulemah, thou art all I am!”

The tears, gestures, voice with which Manetho thus delivered himself, shocked the northern taste of Helwyse. Through the semi-scriptural, symbolic language, he fancied he could discern a basis of materialism so revolting that the man of the world—the lover now!—listened with shame and anger. Here was a professed worshipper of Gnulemah, who ascribed to her no nobler worth than to be the incarnation of his own desires and passions! It was abject self-idolatry, thought Balder, masquerading as a lofty form of idealisation.

The priest's mind was in a more complex condition than Balder imagined. His absorption in Gnulemah, if only as she was the instrument of his dominant purpose, must have

been complete ; the success (as he deemed it) of his life was staked on her. But, in addition to this, the unhappy man had, unwittingly, and with the vehemence of his ill-ordered nature, grown to love the poison draught brewed for his enemy ! When the enemy's lips touched the cup, did Manetho first become aware that it brimmed with the brewer's own life-blood !

Yet it might have been foreseen. He loved her, not because she was identified with his aims, nor even because she was beautiful, but (and not inconsistently with his theoretical belief in her devilishness) because she was pure and true. Under the persuasion that he was influencing her nature in a manner only possible, if at all, to a moral and physical despot, he had himself been ruled by her stronger and loftier spirit. The transcendent cunning on which he had prided himself, as regarded his plan of educating Gnulemah, had amounted to little more than imbecile inaction.

As Manetho prostrated himself, and even touched the hem of Gnulemah's robe to his forehead, Balder looked to see her recoil; but she maintained a composure which argued her not unused to such homage. So much evil, (albeit unintentionally,) had the Egyptian done her,—that she could suffer, while she slighted, his worship. Yet, in the height of her proud superiority to him, she turned with sweet submission to her lover, and, obedient to his whisper, gathered up her purple mantle and passed through the green conservatory to her own door, through which, with a backward parting glance at her master, she superbly vanished. Balder had disliked the scene throughout, yet his love was greater than before. An awe of the woman whose innate force could command a nature like this priest's seemed to give his passion for her a more vigorous fibre.

The two men were now left alone to come to what understanding they might. Manetho

rose to his feet, obliquely eyeing Helwyse, and spoke with the manner and tone of true humility—

“You have seen me in my weakness. I am but a broken man, Balder Helwyse.”

“We had better speak the plain truth to each other,” said Balder, after a pause. “You can have no cause to be friendly to me. I cannot extenuate what I did. I think I meant to kill you.”

“You were not to blame!” exclaimed the other vehemently, holding up his hands. “You had to deal with a madman!”

“It is a strange train of chances has brought us together again; it ought to be for some good end. I came here unawares, and, but for this ring, should not have known that we had met before.”

“I lie under your suspicion on more accounts than one,” observed Manetho, glancing in the other’s face. “I have assumed your uncle’s

name, and the disposal of his property; and I have concealed his death; but you shall be satisfied on all points. The child, too, Gnu-lemah!—I have kept her from sight and knowledge of the world, but not without reason and purpose, as you shall hear. Ah! I am but a poor broken man, liable, as you have seen, to fits of madness and extravagance. You shall hear everything. And listen,—as a witness that I shall speak truth, I will say my say before the face of Hiero Glyphic yonder, and upon the steps of his altar! See, I desire neither to palliate nor falsify. Shall we go in?”

With some repugnance Helwyse followed the priestly figure through the low-browed door. He had seen too much of men to allow any instinctive aversion to influence him, in the absence of logical evidence. And this man's words sounded fair; his frank admission of occasional insanity accounted for many anomalies. Nevertheless, and apart from any

question of personal danger, Balder felt ill-at-ease, like animals before a thunderstorm. As he sat down beside his companion on the steps of the black altar, and glanced up at the yellow visage that presided over it, he tried to quiet his mind in vain; even the thought of Gnu-lemah yielded a vague anxiety!

XXVIII.

BETROTHAL.

THE ring, which Balder had taken off with the intention of returning it to its owner, still remained between his thumb and finger; and as he sat under the gloom of the altar, its excellent brilliancy caught his eye. He had never examined it minutely. It was pure as virtue, and possessed similar power to charm the dusky air into seven-hued beauty. A fountain of lustre continually welled up from its interior, like an exhaustless spring of wisdom. From amidst the strife of the little serpents it shone serenely forth, with divine assurance of good—eternal before the battle began, and immortal after it should cease. The light refreshed the somewhat jaded Helwyse, and during the ensuing

interview he ever and anon renewed the draught.

But the Egyptian seemed to address a silent invocation to the mummy. The anti-spiritual kind of immortality belonging to mummies may have been congenial to Manetho's soul. Awful is that loneliness which even the prospect of death has deserted, and which must prolong itself throughout a lifeless and hopeless Forever! If Manetho could imagine any bond of relationship between this perennial death's-head and himself, no marvel that he cherished it jealously.

"You shall hear first about myself," said the priest; "yet, truly, I know not how to begin! No mind can know another, nor even its own essential secrets. My time has been full of visions and unrealities. I am the victim of a thing which, for lack of a better name, I call myself!"

"Not a rare sickness," remarked Balder.

"A ghost no spell can lay! It grasps the

rudder, and steers towards gulfs the will abhors. A crew of unholy, mutinous impulses fling abroad words and thoughts unrecognisable. Not Manetho talked in the blackness of that night; but a devil, to whom I listened shuddering, unable to control him!"

"The Reverend Manetho Glyphic, my cousin by adoption—and sometimes a devil!" muttered Balder, musingly. "I had forgotten him."

People are more prone to err in fancying themselves righteous, than the reverse; nevertheless, the course and limits of self-deception are indefinite. It is within possibility for a man to believe himself wicked, while his actual conduct is ridiculously blameless, even praiseworthy! Although intending to mislead Balder, Manetho's utterances were true to a degree unsuspected by himself. He was more true than had he tried to be so, because truth lay too profound for his recognition!

"A shallower man," he resumed, "would bear

a grudge against the hand that clutched his throat ; but I owe no relationship to the madman you chastised. And there are deep reasons why I must set your father's son above all other men in my regard."

"My father seldom spoke of you, and never as of an especial friend," interposed the ingenuous Balder.

"He knew not my feeling towards him, nor would he have comprehended it. It is a thing I myself can scarce understand. To the outward eye there is juster cause for hatred than for love.

"I will speak openly to you what has hitherto lain between my heart and God. Before Thor saw your mother, I had loved her. My life's hope was to marry her. Thor came,—and my hope lingered and died. For it, was no resurrection." Here Manetho broke all at once into sobs, covering his face with his hands ; and when he continued, his voice was softened with tears.

"Thor called her to him, and she gladly went. He stormed and carried with ease the fortress which, at best, I could hope only slowly to undermine. She loved him as women love a conqueror; she might have yielded me, at most, the grace of a condescending queen. I kept silence: to whom could I speak? I had felt great ambitions—to become honoured and famous—to preach the Gospel as it had not yet been preached—all ambitions that a lover may feel. But the tree died for lack of nourishment. See what is left!"

He opened out his arms with a gesture wanting neither in pathos nor dignity. Balder could not but sympathise with what he felt to be a genuine emotion.

"Amidst the ruins of my Memphis, I kept silence. I hated—myself! for my powerlessness to keep her. In my hours of madness I hated her too, and him; but that was madness indeed! Deeper down was a sanity that loved

him. Since he had made my love his, I must love him. So only might I still love her. The only beauty left my ruins was that!

"She died; and with her would have died all sanity—all love, but that her children kept me back from worse ruin than was mine already. They were a link to bind me to the good. Now Thor is dead, but still his son—her son—survives. Hence is it that you are more to me than other men."

"Did Doctor Glyphic know nothing of this?"

"I never told him of either my hope or my despair. My beloved master! he lived and died without suspicion that I had striven to be a brother as well as son to him."

"When did he die?"

"Eighteen years ago," said Manetho, solemnly. "You are the first to whom his death has been revealed. Beloved master! have I not obeyed thy will?" and he looked up to his master's parchment visage.

"I discovered his death for myself, you know," observed Helwyse. "But it could not have been more than eighteen years since my father, then on the point of departure for Europe, saw Hiero Glyphic alive!"

"Yes, yes! Did he ever tell you what passed on that interview?" demanded Manetho, eagerly.

"Little more than a farewell, I think. There was some talk about the estate. At my uncle's death, the house was to come to you, the property to my father or his heirs. But neither expected at that time that it was to be their last meeting."

"Was no one mentioned beside Thor's children and myself?" asked the priest, looking askant at Balder as he spoke.

"No; my uncle neither had nor expected children, as far as I know!"

"Thor did not see her—Gnulemah?"

"Gnulemah?—how should he have seen her?" exclaimed Balder, in surprise.

"Then her mystery remains!" said Manetho, looking up.

He had perhaps doubted whether any suspicion of who Gnulemah really was, had found its way to the young man's mind. The latter's reception of his question reassured him. There could be no risk in catering to his aroused curiosity. The account Manetho now gave was true, though falsehood lurked in the pauses.

"That day Thor came, I left the house early in the morning. It was night when I returned: and Thor was gone. The house was dark, and at first there was no sound. But presently I heard the voice of a child, murmuring and babbling baby words. I passed through the outer hall and the conservatory, and came to where we now are. The lamp was burning, as it has burned ever since.

"I saw him lying on the altar steps—lying so!" Marrying act to word, the Egyptian slid down and lay prostrate at the altar's foot. "He was dead and cold!" he added: and gave way to a shuddering outburst of grief.

Balder's nerves were a little staggered at this tale, with its heightening of dramatic action and morbid circumstance: and he was silent until the actor (if such he were) was in some degree repossessed of himself. Then he asked,

"What of the child?"

"I have named her Gnulemah. She played about the dead body, bright and careless as the flame of the lamp. Whence she came, she could not tell, nor had I seen her before that day. It seemed that, at the moment my master's life burned out, hers flamed up: and since that day it has lighted and warmed my solitude."

"And Doctor Glyphic"—

"I embalmed him!" cried Manetho, clasping his hands in grotesque enthusiasm. "It was my privilege and my consolation to render his body immortal. In my grief I rejoiced at the opportunity of manifesting my devotion. Not the proudest of the Pharaohs was more sumptuously preserved than he! In that labour of love, there was no cunning secret of the art that I did not employ. Night and day I worked alone; and while he lay in the long nitre bath, I watched or slept beside him. Then I enwound him thousandfold in finest linen smeared with fragrant gum, and hid his beloved form in the coffin he had chosen long before."

"Did my uncle choose this form of burial?"

"He lived in hopes of it! It was his wish that his body might be disposed as became his name, and the passion that had ruled his life. Me only did he deem worthy of the task, and equal to it. Had I died before him, his fairest

hope would have been blighted — his life a failure !”

“ A dead failure, truly !” muttered Balder, impelled by the very grewsomeness of the subject to jest about it. “ Was his loftiest aspiration to mummy and be mummied ?—But yours was a dangerous office to fulfil, cousin Manetho. Had the death got abroad, you might have been suspected of foul play !”

“ The cause was worth the risk,” replied the other sententiously.

Helwyse shot a keen look at his companion, but could discern in him none of the common symptoms of guilt. The priest, however, was a mine of sunless riddles, one lode connecting with another : it was idle attempting to explore them all at once. So the young man recurred to that vein which was of most immediate interest to himself.

“ Have you no knowledge concerning Gnu-lemah’s origin ?” he inquired.

Manetho laid his long brown hand on Balder's arm.

"If she be not Gnulemah, daughter of fire, it must rest with you to give her another name," said he.

"I care not who was her father or her mother," rejoined the lover, after a short silence: "Gnulemah is herself!"

The lithe fingers on his arm clutched it hard for a moment, and Manetho averted his face. When he turned again, his features seemed to express exultation, mingled with a sinister flavour of some darker emotion.

"Son of Thor; you have your father's frankness. Do you love her?"

"You saw that I loved her," returned Balder, his black eyes kindling somewhat intolerantly.

"If I can hasten by one hour the consummation of that love, my life will have been worth the living!"

"That's kindly spoken!" exclaimed Hel-

wyse, heartily ; and opening his strong white hand, he took the narrow brown one into its grasp. He had not been prepared for so friendly a profession.

“ When I have seen your soul tied to hers in a knot that even death may not loosen,—and if it be permitted me to tie the knot : I shall have drained the cup of earthly happiness ! ” He spoke with a deliberate intensity not altogether pleasant to the ear. He would not relinquish Balder’s hand, as he continued in his high-strung vein,

“ I know at last for whom my flower has bloomed. Through the world, across seas, by strange accidents has Providence brought you safe to this spot ; and has made you what you are, and her, incomparable among women.—You love her with heart and soul, Balder Helwyse ? ”

“ So that the world seems frail, and I—except for my love—insignificant ! ”

In the sudden emphasis of his question, Manetho had risen to his feet; and Balder likewise had started up, before giving his reply. As he spoke the words strongly forth, his swarthy companion seemed to catch them in the air, and breathe them in. Slowly an expression of joy, that could hardly be called a smile, welled forth from his long eyes, and forced its way, with dark persistency of glee, through all his face.

“By you only in the world would I have her loved!” he said; and repeated it more than once.

He remained a full minute leaning with one arm on the altar, his eyes abstracted. Then he said abruptly,

“Why not be married soon?”

The lover looked up questioningly, a deep throb in his heart.

“Soon—soon!” reiterated Manetho. “Love is a thing of moments more than of years. I

know it! Do you stand idle while Gnulemah awaits you? We may die to-morrow!"

"I have no right to hurry her," said Helwyse in a low voice. "She knows nothing of the world. I would marry her to-morrow—"

"To-morrow! why not to-day? Why wait? that she may learn the falsehoods of society—to flirt, dress, gossip, crave flattery? Why do you hesitate? Speak out! son of Thor."

"I have spoken. Do you doubt me? Were it possible, she should be my wife this hour!"

"Oh!" murmured Manetho, the incisiveness of his manner melting away as suddenly as it came; "now have you proved your love. You shall be made one—one!—to-day. Four-and-twenty years ago this day, I married your parents on this very spot. The anniversary shall become a double one!"

The black eye-sockets of the mummy stared Balder in the face. But at a touch from Ma-

netho, he turned, and saw Gnulemah bright with beautiful enchantment, in the doorway.

“Yes, to-day!” he said impetuously.

“You shall wed her with that ring!” whispered the victorious tempter in his ear. “Go to her; tell her what marriage is! I will call you soon.”

The lover went, and the woman, coming forward, sweetly met him half-way. But glancing back again before passing out, Balder saw that the priest had vanished: and the lamp-light, flickering over the mummy's dry features, wrought them into a shadowy semblance of emotion.

XXIX.

A CHAMBER OF THE HEART.

MANETHO neither sank through the granite floor, nor ascended in the smoke of the lamp. He unlocked a door (to the panels of which the clock was affixed, and which it concealed) and let himself into his private study, a room scarce seven feet wide, though corresponding in length and height with the dimensions of the outer temple. Books and papers were kept here, and such other things of a private or valuable nature as Manetho wished should be inaccessible to outsiders. Against the wall opposite the door stood a heavy mahogany table; beside it, a deep-bottomed chair, in which the priest now sat down.

The room was destitute of windows, properly so called. The walls were full twenty feet

high; and at a distance of some sixteen feet from the floor, a series of low horizontal apertures pierced the masonry, allowing the light of heaven to penetrate in an embarrassed manner, and hesitatingly to reveal the interior. Viewed from without, these narrow slits would be mistaken for mere architectural indentations. To the inhabitant they were of more importance, contracted though they were; and albeit one could not look out of them, they served as ventilators, and to distinguish between fine and cloudy weather.

In his earlier and more active days, Manetho had lived and worked throughout the whole extent of this study, and it had been kept clean and orderly to its remotest corner. But as years passed, and the range of his sympathies and activities narrowed, the ends of the room had gradually fallen into dusty neglect, till at length only the small space about the chair and table was left clear and available. The rest

was impeded by books, instruments of science, and endless chaotic rubbish ; while spiders had handed down their ever-broadening estates from father to child, through innumerable Araneidæan generations. A gray uniformity had thus come to overspread everything ; and with the exceptions of a cracked celestial globe, and the end of a worm-eaten old ladder, there was nothing to catch the attention.

Here might the Egyptian indulge himself in whatever extravagances of word or act he chose, secure from sight or hearing ; and here had he spent many an hour in such solitary exercises as no sane mind can conceive. To him the room was thick with associations. Here had he pursued his studies, or helped the Doctor in his erratic experiments and research ; here, with Helen in his thoughts, he had shaped out a career,—not all of Christian humility and charity, perhaps, but at least unstained by positive sin, and not unmindful of

domestic happiness. Here, again, had Salome visited him, bringing discord and delight in equal parts; for at times, with the strong heat of youth, he had vowed to love only her and to forsake ambition; and anon the bloodless counsels of worldly power and welfare banished her with a curse for having crossed his path. Head and heart were always at war in Manetho. The talismanic diamond flashed or waned, and fiercely wriggled the little fighting serpents.

At length Thor Helwyse's gauntlet was thrown into the ring; and peace—if still present to outward seeming—abode not in the feverish soul of the Egyptian. But it was his nature to dissemble. In this room he had often outwatched the night, chewing the cud of his wrongs, invoking vengeance upon the thwarter of his hopes, and swearing through his teeth to even the balance between them. The black serpent held the golden one helpless in his

coils. The obtuse Doctor, blundering in at morning, would find his adopted son with pallid cheeks and glittering eyes, but ever ready with a smile and pleasant greeting, obedience and help. Hiero Glyphic, however wayward and cross-grained, never had cause to censure this creature of his,—to remind him that he might have been food for crocodiles!

Manetho's dissimulation was almost without flaw. Even Helen, whose fancy had played with him at first, but who in time had indolently yielded to the fascination exerted over her, and even gone so far as to permit his adulation, and accept in the ring the mystic pledge thereof (during all the countless ages of its experience it had never touched woman's hand before),—even she, when her lazy heart and overbearing spirit were at length aroused and quelled by the voice rather of a master than suitor, was deceived by forsaken Manetho's unruffled face, gentle voice, and downcast eyes.

She told herself that his love had never dared be warmer than a kind of worship, like that of a pagan for his idol, apart from human passion ; such, at all events, had been her understanding of his attentions. As to the ring, it had been tendered as an offering at the shrine of abstract womanhood ; to return it too soon would imply a supposition of more personal sentiment. Neither must Thor see it, however ; his rough sense would fail to appreciate her fine-drawn distinction. So she concealed it in her bosom, and Manetho's serpents were ever between Thor and his wife's heart. She was false both to husband and lover.

Great Thor, meanwhile, had pitied the slender Egyptian, and in a kindly way despised him, with his supple manners, quiet words, and religious studies. To the young priest's timid yet earnest request for permission to pronounce the marriage-service of him and his bride, Thor had assented with gruff heartiness.

“Marry us? Of course! marry us as fast as you can, if it gives you any pleasure, my friend of the crocodile. A good beginning for your ministerial career,—marrying a couple who love each other as much as Nell and I do. Eh, Nellie?”

The ceremony over, Manetho had retired to his study, and there passed the night—their marriage-night! What words and tones, what twistings of face and body did those passionless walls see and hear? How the smooth, studious, submissive priest yearned for power to work his will for one day! And as the cool still morning sheared the lustre from his lamp-flame, how desolate he felt, with his hatred and despair and blaspheming rage! Evil passions are but poor company, in the early morning.

But was not Salome left him? The only sincerely tender words he had ever spoken to woman, had been said to her: his humblest and happiest thoughts had been born of their

early acquaintance—before he had raised his eyes to the proud and languid mistress. Yet on her only did the evil passions of Manetho wreak themselves in harm and wrong: her only, on a later day, did he dastardly strike down. Poor Salome had given him her heart. These walls had seen their meetings.—

Years afterwards, Manetho had here embalmed his foster-father: through long hours had he laboured at his hateful task, with curious zest and conscientiousness. As regarded the strange place of sepulture, the Egyptian had perhaps imagined a symbolic fitness in enclosing his human immortal in the empty shell of time. Over this matter of Hiero Glyphic's death and burial, however, must ever brood a cloud of mystery. Undoubtedly Manetho loved the man—but death was not always the worst of ills in Manetho's philosophy!

The clock had been affixed to the study door both as an additional concealment, and possibly

as a congenial sentry over the interior associations. Since then the place had become the clergyman's almost daily resort. Pacing the contracted floor, sitting moodily in the chair,—many a brooding hour had gone over his barrenly busy head, and written its darkening record in his book of life. Here had been schemed that plan of revenge, whose insanity the insane schemer could not perceive. Nor could he understand that mightier powers than he could master worked against him, and even used his efforts to bring forth contrary results.

But not all hours had passed so. Spaces there had been wherein evil counsels had retired to a cloudy background, athwart which had brightened a rainbow, intangible, whose source was hidden, but whose colours were true before his eyes. The grace and ærial beauty of sunshine lightened through the rain,—the pleasing loveliness of essential life was projected on the gloom of evil imaginations. For Man-

etho's actual deeds were apt to be prompted by far gentler influences than governed his theories. The man was better than his mind : and goodness, perhaps, bears an absolute blessing ; insomuch that the sinner doing ignorant good, yet feels the benefit thereof ; just as the rain, however dismal, cannot prevent the sun from making rainbows out of it.

On this particular morning Manetho sank into his deep-seated chair, and was quite still. A great part of what had hitherto made his daily life, ended here. The activity of existence was over for him. Thought, feeling, hope could live hereafter only as phantoms of memory. But to look back on evil done is not so pleasant as to plan it : the dead body of a foe moves us in another way than his living hostile person.

When, therefore, Manetho should have hurled to its mark the long-poised spear, he would have little to look forward to. That one mo-

ment of triumph must repay, both for what had been and was to come. To-day of all his days, then, must each sense and faculty be in exquisite condition. Unseasonably enough, however, he found himself in a perversely dull and callous state. Could Providence so cajole him as to mar the only joyful hour of his life! Then better off than he were savages, who could destroy their recusant idols. But nothing short of spiritual suicide would have destroyed the idol of Manetho!

He was wearing to-day the same priestly robe which he had put on when, for the first and last time, he performed a ministerial duty. In this robe had he married Helen to Thor. Itself a precious relic of antiquity, it had once dignified the shoulders of a contemporary of Manetho's remotest ancestors. Old Hiero Glyphic had counted it amongst his chiefest treasures: and on his sister's wedding-day had produced it from its repository, insisting that

the minister should wear it instead of the orthodox sacerdotal costume. Thereafter it had lain untouched, till to-day.

Manetho brooded over the dim magnificence of its folds, sitting amidst the cobwebbed rubbish, a narrow glint of sunshine creeping slope-downwards from the crevice above his head. He smoothed the fabric abstractedly with his hand, recalling the thoughts and scenes of four-and-twenty years ago.

“I joined them in the holy bonds of matrimony—read over them that service, those sacred words heavy with solemn benediction. Rich, smooth, softly modulated was my voice, missing not one just emphasis or melodious intonation. Ah! had they seen my soul. But my eyes were half closed like the crocodile’s: yet never losing sight of the two I was uniting in sight of God and man.—The devil too was there. He turned the blessings my lips uttered

into blighting curses, that fell on the happy couple like pestilential rain !

“ Laughable ! Covered head to foot with curses, and felt them not ! All was smiles, blushes, happiness, forward-looking to a long, joyful future. They knelt before me ; I uplifted my hands and invoked the last blessing—the final curse ! My heart burned, and the smoke of its fire enveloped bride and groom, fouling his yellow beard, and smirching her silvery veil ; shutting out heaven from their prayers, and blackening their path before them. They neither felt nor knew. They kissed—I saw their lips meet—as Balder and Gnulemah to-day. Then I covered my face and seemed to be in prayer !

“ Gnulemah—I hate her !—yes, but hatred sometimes touches the heart like love. I love her !—to marry her ? Woe to him who becomes her husband ! As a daughter ?—no daughter is she of mine !—I hate her, then.

“Why am I childless?—how would I have loved a child! I would have left all else to love my child. I would have been the one father in the world! My life should have been full of love as it has been of hate. Why did not God send me a wife and a daughter?”

Men's ears have grown deaf to any save the most common-place oracles. But there is ever a warning voice for who will listen. One may object that its language is unknown, or its whisper inaudible; but to the question, “Whence your ignorance and deafness?” what shall be the answer?

In Manetho's case, it appears to have been the venerable robe that took on itself the task of remonstrance.

“You are unreasonable, friend,” it interposed with a gentle rustle. “Gnulemah, if not your daughter, might however have stood you in place of one; and she would have done you just as much good, in the way of softening and

elevating your nature, as though she had been the issue of your own loins. You have turned the milk and honey of your life into gall and wormwood: and I wish I could feel sure that only you would get the benefit of it!"

The reproof had as well been spared; it is doubtful whether the culprit heard so much as a word of it. His reverie rambled on.

"Keen—that Balder! he half suspects me. Had I not so hurried him to a conclusion, he would have questioned me too closely. He shall know all presently, even as I promised him!—shall hear a sounder guess at Gnulemah's genealogy than was made to-day.

"Do I love her?—only as the means to my end! The end once gained, I shall hate her as I do him. But not yet—and therefore must I love him as well as her. They shall be, to-day, my beloved children! To-morrow—how shall I endure till to-morrow—all the night through? Oh, Gnulemah!—

“They love each other well—seem made to make each other happy; yet they have come together from the ends of the earth to be each others’ curse! Only if I keep silence might it be otherwise, for love might tame the devil that I have bred in Gnulemah. Even now she seems more angel than devil!—Am I mad?”

He straightened himself in his chair, and glanced up towards the crevice whence slanted the dusty sunshine. The old robe took the opportunity to deliver its final warning.

“Not yet mad beyond remedy, Manetho; but you look up too seldom at the sunshine, and brood too often over your own dusty depths. You have had no consciously unselfish thought during the last quarter of a century. You eat, drink, and breathe only Manetho! This room is yours, because it is fullest of rubbish, and least looks out upon the glorious universe. Break down your walls! take broom in hand without

delay ! Proclaim at once the crime you meditate. Go ! there is still sunshine in this dust-hole of yours, and more of heaven in every man than he himself dreams of. The sun is passing to the other side. Go while it shines !”

But Manetho’s dull ears heard not ; and the aged garment of truth spoke no more.

XXX.

DANDELIONS.

It seems a pity that, with all imagination at our service, we should have to confine our excursions within so narrow a domain as this of Hiero Glyphic's. One tires of the best society, uncondemned with an occasional foreign relish, even of doubtful digestibility. Barring this, it only remains to relieve somewhat the monotony of our food, by variety in the modes of dishing it up.

Balder had been no whit disconcerted at the priest's abrupt evanishment. The divine sphere of Gnulemah had touched him with its sweet magnetism, and he was sensible of little beyond it. Their hands greeted like life-long friends. Drawing hers within his arm, he still kept hold of it, and her rounded shoulder softly pressed

his, as they loitered out between the impenetrable sphinxes. The conservatory, however beautiful in itself and by association, was too small to hold their hearts at this moment. They passed on, and through the columns of the Moorish portico, into the fervent noon sunshine.

Grasshoppers chirped : fine - buzzing flies darted in swift circles and lit again : birds giggled and gossipped, bobbing and swinging among swaying boughs. Battalions of vast green trees stood grand in shadow-lakes of cooler green, their myriad leaves twinkling light and dark. Tender gleams of river topped the enameled bank, — the further shore a slumbering El Dorado. The trees in the distant orchard wore bridal veils, and even Gnulemah's breath was not much sweeter than theirs !

Emerging arm-in-arm on the enchanted lawn, the lovers turned southwards up the winding avenue. The fragrance, the light and warmth, the bird and insect voices imperfectly ex-

pressed their own heart-happiness. The living turf softly pressed up their feet. This was the fortunate hour that comes not twice. Happy those to whom it comes at all! To live was such full bliss, every new movement overflowed the cup. Joy was it to look on earth and sky: but to behold each other was heaven! More life in a moment such as this, than in twenty years of scheming more successful than Manetho's.

They followed the same path Helen had walked the eve of her death: and presently arrived at the old bench. Shadow and sunshine wrestled playfully over it, while the green blood of the leaves overhead glowed vividly against the blue. Around the bench the grass grew taller, as on a grave: and crisp lichens, gray and brown, overspread its surface. Man had neglected it so long that Nature, overcoming her diffidence towards his handywork, had at length claimed it for her own.

The glade was full of great golden dandelions,

whose soft yellow crowns were almost too heavy for the slender necks. The prince and princess of the fairy-tale paused here, recognising the spot as the most beautiful on earth,—albeit only since their love's arrival. They seated themselves not on the bench, but on the yet more primitive grass beside it. They had not spoken as yet. Balder plucked some dandelions, and proceeded to twist them into a chain ; and Gnulemah, after watching him for a while, followed his example.

“ You and I have sat on the grass and woven such chains before,” asserted she at length ; “ when was it ? ”

“ I haven't done such a thing since I was a child not much taller than a dandelion,” returned Balder. He was not ætherial enough to follow Gnulemah in her apparently fanciful flight, else might he have lighted on a discovery to which all the good sense and logic in the world would not have brought him.

“ Yes ; we have made these chains before ! ”

reiterated Gnulemah, looking at her companion in a preoccupied manner. "They were to have chained us together forever."

"We should have made them of stronger stuff, then. But which of us broke the chain?"

"They took us away from each other and it was never finished.—Do you remember nothing?"

"The present is enough for me," said her lover: and he finished his necklace with a handsome clasp of blossoms, and threw it over her neck. She gave a low sigh of satisfaction.

"I have been waiting for it ever since that old time. And here is mine for you."

Thus adorned by each others' hands, their love seemed greater than before, and they laughed from pure delight. Their bonds looked fragile; yet it would need a stronger wrench to part them than had they been cables of iron or gold, unsustained by the subtile might of love.

"Let us link them together," proposed Bal-

der ; and loosening a link of his chain, he reunited it inside Gnulemah's. " We must keep together," he continued with a smile, " or the marriage-bonds will break."

" Is this marriage, Balder ? to be tied together with flowers."

" One part of marriage. It shows the world that we belong only to each other."

" How could they help knowing that,—for to whom else could we belong ? besides, why should they know ?"

" Because," answered Balder after some consideration, " the world is made in such a way, that unless we record all we do by some visible symbol, everything would get into confusion."

" No, no," protested Gnulemah earnestly, " Only God should know how we love. Must the world know our words and thoughts, and how we have sat beneath these trees ?—Then let us not be married !"

They were leaning side to side against the

bench, along whose edge Balder had stretched an arm to cushion Gnulemah's head. As he turned to look at her, a dash of sunlight was quivering on her clear smooth cheek, and another ventured to nestle warmly below the head of the guardian serpent on her bosom, for Gnulemah and the sun had been lovers long before Balder's appearance. Where breathed such another woman? From the low turban that pressed her hair, to the bright sandals on her fine bronze feet, there was no fault, save her very uniqueness. She belonged not to this era but to the Golden Age, past or to come. Could she ever be conformed to the world of to-day? Dared her lover assume the responsibility of revealing to this noble soul all the mean sophistries, little pleasures and low aims of the imperfect age? Could he change the world to suit her needs? or endure to see her change to suit the world? Moreover, changing the world might she not change towards him?

der she loved was a grander man than any Balder knew. Might she not learn to abhor the hand which should unveil to her the gorgon features of fallen humanity?—Much has man lost in losing Paradise!

Contemplating Gnulemah's entrance into the outer world, Manetho had anticipated her ruin from the flowering of the evil seed, which he believed himself to have planted in her. Might not the same result issue from a precisely opposite cause? The Arcadian fashion in which the lovers' passion had ripened, must soon change for ever. It was perilous to advance, but to retreat was impossible. Balder was at bay: had he loved Gnulemah less, he would have regretted Charon's ferry-boat. But his love was greater for the danger and difficulty wherewith it was fraught. He could not summon the millenium: well, he might improve himself.

“If I could but shut her glorious eyes to all

the shabby littleness they will have to see, we might hazard the rest," he sighed to himself. "If the pure visions of her maiden years might veil from her those gross realities of every day life! With what face shall I meet her glance after it has suffered the first shock?"

Meanwhile her last objection remained unanswered, and Balder, distrustful of his capacity, was inspired to seek inspiration from her he would instruct.

"Tell me how you love me, Gnulemah," said he.

She roused herself, and bending her face to his, breathlessly kissed his lips. Then she drooped her warm cheek on his shoulder, and whispered the rest.—

"My love is to be near you and to breathe when you breathe: it is love to become you, as water becomes wave. And love would make me sweet to you as honey and music and flowers. I love to be needed by you, as you need food

and drink and sleep : and my love will be loved, as God loves the world."

To the lover these sentences were tender and sublime poetry. The tears came to his eyes, hearing her speak out her loving soul so simply. He had travelled through the world, while she had lived her life between a wall and a precipice. But not the noisy, gaudy, gloomy crust which is fresh to-day, and to-morrow hardens, and the next day crumbles, is the world: but the fire-globe within: and Gnulemah was nearer that fire than Balder. There was puissance in her simplicity,—in her ignorance of that crust which he had so widely studied. Her knowledge was more profound than his, for she had never learned to stultify it with reasons.

"It is true—God only can know our love," said Balder, and having said it, he felt his mind clear and strengthen. For it is the acknowledgment of God that lends the deepest seeing

to the eye, and tunes the universe to man: and Balder, at this moment of mingled love, humility and fear, made and confessed the supreme discovery.—“Only He knows what our love is, but the marriage-rite informs the world that He knows it.”

“But why must the world know?” persisted Gnulemah, still seeming to shrink at the idea.

“Because it is wholesome for all men to know that we have made God party to our union. That our love may be pure and immortal, we must look through each other to Him; the acknowledgment will keep others as well as ourselves from misusing love’s happiness.”

“Then, after we have knelt together before Him, we shall be no longer two, but one!” Gnulemah spoke, after some pause, in a full tone of joy; yet her voice shrank at the last, from the feeling that she had penetrated all at once to a holy place. A delicious fear seized

her, and she clung to her lover so that he could perceive the tremor that agitated her.

No more was said. Their confidence was in each other : with Balder at her side, Gnulemah was fearful of the world no longer. But her visions were all spiritual ; even the kisses on her lips were to her a sacred miracle ! Love makes children of men and women,—shows them the wisdom of unreason and the value of soap-bubbles. These lovers must meet the world, but the light and freshness of the Golden Age should accompany them. The man held the maiden's hand, and so faced the future with a smile.

Few as were the hours since they first had seen each other, it seemed as though they could hardly know each other better : then why put off the consummation a single hour ? Manetho had been right, and Balder marvelled at having required the spur. He knew of no material hindrances : unlimited resources would be his,

and these would render easier Gnulemah's introduction to society. Perhaps (for doubtless Manetho would desire it) they might begin housekeeping in this very house, and thus, by gradual approaches, make their way to life's realities—vulgarly so called !

At this moment, Balder's respect for wealth was many fold greater than ever it had been before. It should be the sword and shield wherewith he would protect the woman of his heart. Gnulemah was not of the kind who need the discipline of poverty : her beauty and goodness would be best nurtured beneath an affluent sun. , Wants and inconveniences would rather pain and mystify, than educate her. How good was that God who had vouchsafed not only the blessing, but the means of enjoying it !

God gave Balder Helwyse opportunity to prove the soundness of his faith. Labour and poverty awaited him ; what else and worse let

the time show. In anguish, fear and humiliation had his love been born, but the birth-pangs had been as brief as they were intense. A brave soul's metal is more severely tried by crawling years of monotonous effort, discord of must with wish, and secret self-suppression and misgiving. Happily life is so ordered that no blow can crush unless dealt from within, nor is any sunshine worth having that shines only from without.—

Balder's eyes were softer than their wont, and there was a tender and sweet expression about his mouth. Never had life been so inestimable a blessing,—never had nature looked so 'divinely alive. He could imagine nothing gloomy or forbidding; in darkness's self he would have found germs of light. His love was a panoply against ill of mind or body. He thought he perceived, once for all, the insanity of selfishness and sin.

Suddenly he was conscious through Gnule-

mah of the same shiver that had visited her in the conservatory that morning. Looking round he was startled to see beyond the near benison of her sumptuous face, the tall form of the Egyptian priest. He was not a dozen yards away, advancing slowly towards them. Balder sprang up.

“ Our chain—you have broken it ! ” exclaimed Gnulemah. It was only a flower chain, but flowers are the bloom and luxury of life.

Manetho came up with a smile.

“ Come my children ! ” said he, “ This chain would soon have faded and fallen apart of itself, but the chain I will forge you is stronger than time and weightier than dandelions. Come ! ”

Gnulemah picked up the broken links, and they followed him to the house.

XXXI.

MARRIED.

THE significant part of most life histories is the record of a few detached hours, the rest being consequence and preparation. Helwyse had lived in constant mental and physical activity from childhood up : but though he had speculated much, and ever sought to prove the truth by practice, yet he had failed to create adequate emergencies, and was like an untried sword, polished and keen, but lacking still the one stern proof of use.

Thus, although a man of the world, in a deeper sense he was untouched by it. He had been the sentimental spectator of a drama wherein some shadow of himself seemed to act. The mimic scenes had sometimes moved him to laughter or to tears, but he had never quite

lost the suspicion of an unreality under all. The best end had been—in a large sense—beauty. Beauty of love, of goodness, of strength, of wisdom,—beauty of every kind and degree, but nothing better! Beauty was the end rather than the trait of all desirable things. To have power was beautiful, and beautiful was the death that opened the way to freer and wider power. Most beautiful was Almightiness: yet, lapsing thence, it was beautiful to begin the round again in fresh, new forms.

This kind of spider-webs cannot outlast the suns and snows. Personal passion disgusts one with brain-spun systems of the universe, and may even lead to a mistrust of mathematics! One feels the overwhelming power of other than intellectual interests; and discovers in himself a hitherto unsuspected universe, profound as the mystery of God, where the cockle-shell of mental attainments is lost like an asteroid in the abyss of space.

What is the mind?—A little window, through which to gaze out upon the vast heart-world : a window whose crooked and clouded pane may be diligently cleaned and enlarged day by day : but, too often, the deep view beyond is mistaken for a picture painted on the glass and limited by its sash ! Let, by all means, the window expand till the darksome house be transformed to a crystal palace ! but shall homage be paid the crystal ? Of what value were its transparency, had God not built the heavens and the earth?—

Though Helwyse had failed to touch the core of life, and to recognize the awful truth of its mysteries, he had not been conscious of failure. On the contrary he had become disposed to the belief that he was a being apart from the mass of men and above them : one who could see round and through human plans and passions : could even be separate from himself, and yield to folly with one hand, while the other jotted down the moral of the spectacle. He was calm

in the conviction that he could measure and calculate the universe, and draw its plan in his common-place book. God was his elder brother—himself in some distant but attainable condition. He matched finity against the Infinite,—and thereby cast away man's dearest hope,—that of eternal progress towards the image of Divine perfection.

Once, however, the bow had smitten his heart-strings with a new result of sound, awakening fresh ideas of harmony. When Thor was swept to death by that Baltic wave, Balder leapt after him, hopeless to save, but without demur! The sea hurled him back alone. For many a month thereafter, strange lights and shadows flashed or gloomed across his sky, and sounds from unknown abysses disquieted him. But all was not quite enough; perhaps he was hewn from too staunch materials lightly to change. Yet the sudden shock of his loss left its mark: the props of self-confi-

dence were a little unsettled : and the events whose course we have traced, were therefore able to shake them down.

For destiny rained her sharpest blows on Balder Helwyse all at once, and the attack marks the turning-point of his life. She chose her weapons wisely. He was beaten by tactics which a coarser and shallower nature would have slighted. He sustained the onslaught for the most part with outward composure,—but bleeding inwardly.

His had been a vast egoism, rooted in his nature and trained by his philosophy. It must die, if at all, violently, painfully, and—in silence. The truer and more constant the soul, the more complete the destruction of its idol. Character is not always the slow growth of years : often do the elements mingle long in formless solution : some sudden jar causes them to spring at once to the definite crystal. There had hitherto been a kind of impersonality about Balder,

having its ultimate ground in his blindness to the immutable unity of God. But so soon as his eye became single, he stood pronounced in his individuality, less broadly indifferent than of yore, but organized and firm.

In this inert world the body pursues but imperfectly the processes of the soul. These three days had made small change in Helwyse's face. His expression was less serene than of yore, but pithier as well as more joyful. The humorous indifference had given place to a kindlier humanity. Gone was the glance half satiric, half sympathetic; but in its stead was something warmer and more earnest. For the charity of scepticism was substituted a sentiment less broad, but deeper and truer. It would need an insight supernaturally keen to detect thus early these alterations in the page of Balder's countenance, but their germs are there, to develope afterwards.

During this pause in our narrative, Helwyse

was sitting at his chamber window, awaiting the summons to the ceremony. The afternoon was far advanced, and the landscape lay breathless beneath the golden burden of the lavish sun. The bridegroom rose to his feet; surely the bride must be ready! Was that strange old Nurse delaying her? Did she herself procrastinate? Balder was waxing impatient!

The clear outcry of the hoopoe startled the calm air, and that good little messenger came fluttering in haste to the window. Round its neck was twined a golden dandelion—Gnulemah's love-token! With a knowing upturn of its bright little eye, the bird submitted to being robbed of its decoration: then warbled a keen good-bye, and flew away.

The lover behaved as foolishly towards the dandelion as a lover should.—At last he drew the stem through the button-hole of his velveteen jacket, and was ready to answer in person the shy invitation it conveyed. The bride waited!

His hand was on the latch, when some one knocked. He threw open the door—and had to look twice before recognising Nurse. Her dingy anomalous drapery had been exchanged for another sort of costume. Her scars strove to be hidden beneath the yellow lace and crumpled feathers of an antique headdress. She wore a satin gown of an old fashion, whose pristine whiteness was much impaired by time. An aged fan, ragged, but of tasteful pattern, dangled at her wrist. She resembled some forgotten Ginevra, reappearing after an age's seclusion in the oaken chest. Her aspect was painfully repellent, the more for this pathetic attempt at good looks. The former unlovely garb had a sort of fitness to the blasted features: but so soon as she forsook that uncanny harmony and tried to be like other women, she became undesirably conspicuous.

“The bridesmaid!” came to Balder’s lips,—but did not pass them. He would not hurt the

poor creature's feelings by the betrayal of surprise or amusement. She was a woman—and Gnulemah was no more. According to his love for his wife, must he be tender and gentle towards her sex.

When, therefore, nurse gave him to understand that she was to marshal him to the altar, Balder, never more heroic than at that moment, offered her his arm, which she accepted with an air of scare-crow gentility. Either the change of costume had struck in or it was the symbol of inward change. She seemed struggling against her torpor, her dimness and deadness. She tried, perhaps, to recall the day when that dress was first put on—the day of Helen's marriage, when Salome had attended her mistress to the altar :—when she hoped before many weeks to stand at an altar on her own account.—Not yet, Salome, nor in this world. Perchance not in another ; for they who maim their earthly lives, may not enjoy in heaven the happiness whose

seed was not planted here. The injury is justly irreparable : else had angels been immediately created.

But Salome was practising deception on herself. Airs and graces which might have suited a coquettish lady's-maid, but were in her a ghastly absurdity, did she revive and perpetrate. Struggling to repress the ugly truth, she was in continual dread of exposure. Fain would she dream for an hour of youth and beauty, knowing, yet veiling the knowledge, that it was a dream. Divining her desire, Balder helped out the masquerade as best he might. She was thankfully aware of his kindness, yet shunned acknowledgment, as a too bare betrayal of the cause of thanks.

As they passed a cracked cheval-glass in an intervening room, the bridesmaid stole a glance at her reflection, flirting her fan and giving an imposing whisk to the train of her gown. Helwyse, whom, three days before, this behaviour

would simply have amused, felt only pitying sympathy to-day. Gnulemah was always before him, and charmed his eyes and thoughts even to the hag on his arm. He brought himself to address courteous and pleasant remarks to his companion, and to meet unwincingly her one-eyed glance : and was as gallant as though her pretence had been truth.

On entering the conservatory, Nurse seemed as much agitated as though she, instead of Gnulemah, were to be chief actress in the coming ceremony. At the Sphinx door she relinquished Balder's arm, and hurrying across the conservatory, vanished behind Gnulemah's curtain. As she passed out of sight she threw a parting glance over her shoulder. The action recalled Gnulemah's backward look of the day previous, when she had fled at the sound of the closing door. What ugly fatality suggested so fantastic a parallel between this creature and Balder's future wife !

He entered the temple, which glowed and sparkled like a sombre gem. Many-coloured lamps were hung on wires passing round the hall from pillar to massive pillar. Their glare defined the strange character of the Egyptian architecture and ornament: nevertheless the place looked less real and substantial than in the morning. It seemed the impalpable creation of an enchanter, which his wand would anon dissolve into air once more!

On each side the door sat a statue of polished red granite, with calm regular face and hands on knees. Helwyse, who had not observed them before, fancied them summoned as witnesses to the compact then to be solemnized. Doubtless they had witnessed ceremonies not less solemn or imposing.

On the black marble altar at the further end of the hall was burning some rich incense, whose perfumed smoke, clambering heavily upwards mingled with that of the lamps beneath the

ceiling. On the polished floor, in front, lay a rug of dark blue cloth, heavily bordered with gold: upon it were represented in conscientious profile a number of lank-limbed Egyptians performing some mystic rite. To the right of the altar stood the priest Manetho, apparently engaged in prayer. Balder spoke to him.

“This is more like a tomb than a wedding hall. Would not the conservatory have been more fitting?”

“Better make a tomb the starting-point of marriage than its goal!” smiled the holy man. “And is it not well that your posterity should begin from the spot which saw the union that gave you being? and beneath the eyes of him, but for whom neither this hall, nor we who here assemble, would to-day have existed!” He pointed to the mummy of old Hiero Glyphic, the aspect of which might have left a bad taste in the mouth of Joy herself. Balder shrugged his shoulders.

"It matters little, perhaps, where the seed is sown, so that the flower reach the sunshine at last. But your mummy is an ill-favoured wedding-guest, whatever honour we may owe the man who once lived in it. I would not have Gnulemah"—

"Behold her!" interrupted Manetho, speaking as though a handful of dust had suddenly got in his throat.

Yes, there she came, the old nurse following her like a misshapen shadow. Daughter of sun and moon,—a modern Pandora endowed with the strength of a loftier nature! She was robed in creamy white; her pendants were woven pearls. Fine lines of virgin gold gleamed in her turban, and through her long veil, and along the folds of her girdle. But the serpent necklace had been replaced by the dandelion chain that Balder had made her. Her lips and cheeks were daintily aflame, and a tender fire flickered in her eyes, which saw only Balder.

She was a bridal song such as had not been sung since Solomon.

As the two reached the altar, Salome stepped to one side, and Manetho's eye fell upon her : for a moment his gaze fixed, while a slight movement undulated through his body, as the wave travels along the cord! The old white dress, unseen for five-and-twenty years : some intangible trick of motion or attitude in the wearer : the occasion and circumstance recurring with such near similarity :—these and perhaps other trifles combined to recall long vanished Salome. She had stood at that other wedding, just where nurse was now :—bright, shapely, sparkling-eyed, full of love for him. What a grisly contrast was this !—Why had he thrown away that ardent loving heart ? How sweet and comfortable might life have been to-day, with Salome his wife, and sons and daughters at her side ! daughters beautiful as Gnulemah, sons tall as Balder. But hatred had been his chosen

mistress, and dismal was the progeny begotten on her! The pregnant existence that might have been his, and the scars and barrenness which had actually redounded to him, were symbolised in the remembered Salome, and her of to-day.

The brief reminiscence passed, leaving Manetho face to face with his sacred duty. With the warning of the past in his ears and that of the future before his eyes, did he step unrelenting across the threshold of his crime? At all events he neither hesitated nor turned back. But there was no triumph in his eyes, and his tones and manner were heavy and mechanical: as though the devil (having brought him thus far with his own consent and knowledge) had now to compel a frozen soul in a senseless body!

The service began, none the less hallowed for the lovers, because for Manetho it was the solemn perversion of a sacred ceremony. His voice laboured through the perfumed air, and recoiled in broken echoes from gloomy corners

and deep-tinted walls. The encircling lamps glowed in serried lines of various light: the fantastic incense-flame rustled softly on the altar. The four figures seemed a group of phantoms,—a momentary rich illusion of the eye. And save for their viewless souls, what were they more? Earth is a phantom: but what we cannot grasp is real and remains!—

The rite was over, the diamond gleamed from Gnulemah's finger, and the priest, with uplifted hands, had bade man not part whom God had united. Husband and wife gazed at each other with freshness and wonder in their eyes; as having expected to see some change, and anew delighted at finding more of themselves than ever!

Male and female pervades the universe, and marriage is the end and fulfilment of creation. God has builded the world of love and wisdom, woman and man: truly to live they must unite, she yielding herself to his form, he

moulding himself of her substance. As love unquickened by wisdom is barren, and knowledge impotent unkindled by affection, so are the unmarried lifeless.

Ill and bitter was it, therefore, for Manetho and Salome, after the married ones had departed, taking their happiness with them. The priest's eyes were dry and dull, as he leaned wearily against the smoking altar.

"You did not speak!" he said to the woman, "you saw her betrayed to ruin and pollution, and spoke not to save her!—Dumb? the dead might have moved their tongues in such need as this! She will abhor and curse me for ever! may you share her curse weighted with mine!—Oh Gnulemah!"—

Salome cowered and trembled in her satin dress, beneath the burden of that heavy anathema. She had risen that day, determined to reveal the secret of her life before night. She had been awaiting a favourable moment, but

opportunity or decision still had failed her. Nevertheless another morning should not find her the same nameless, forsaken creature that she was now.—Manetho had bowed his face upon the altar, and so remained without movement. With one hand fumbling at the bosom of her dress—(the scar of her lover's blow should be the talisman to recall his allegiance),—Salome made bold to approach him and timidly touch his arm.

“Unhand me! whatever you are—devil! my time is not yet come!”

He raised a threatening arm, with a gleam of mad ferocity beneath his brows. But the woman did not shrink; the man was her god, and she preferred death at his hands to life without him. Ignorant of the cause of her firmness, it seemed to cow him. He slunk behind the altar, hurriedly unlocked the secret door, and let himself into the study. His haste had left the key in the lock outside. The door

slammed together, the spring bolt caught, and the swathed head of old Hiero Glyphic shook as though the cold of twenty winters had come on him at once.

XXXII.

SHUT IN.

LEFT alone, Salome was taken with a panic, she fancied herself deserted in a giant tomb, with dead men gathering about her. She herself was in truth the grisliest spectre there, in her white satin gown and feathers, and the horror of her hideous face. But she took to flight, and the key remained unnoticed in the lock.

We however must spend an hour with Manetho in his narrow and prison-like retreat. There is less day and more night between these high-shouldered walls than elsewhere; for though the sun is scarce below the horizon, cobwebs seem to pervade the air, making the evening grey before its time. Yonder seated figure is the nucleus of the gloom. The room were less dark and oppressive, but for him!

Does he mean to spend the night here ? He sits at ease, as one who, having laboured the day long hard and honestly, finds repose at sundown grateful. Such calm of mind and body argues inward peace,—or paralysis !

But Manetho has food for meditation, for his work is still incomplete. Ah, it has been but a sour and anxious work after all ! when it is finished, let death come, since death-in-life will be the sole alternative. Yet, will death bring rest to your weariness, think you ? Would not death's eyes look kindlier on you, if you had used more worthily death's brother—life ? What would you give, Manetho, to see all that you have done, undone ? if to undo it were possible !—

One picture is ever before you,—you see it wherever you look, and whether your eyes be shut or open :—two loving souls, standing hand in hand before you to be married. How happy they look ! how nobly confident is

their affection ! with what clear freedom their eyes sound one another's depths. Neither cares to have a thought or feeling unshared by the other.—What have you done, Manetho ?—shall the deed stand ? O dark and distorted soul ! the minutes are slipping fast away, and you are slipping with them to a black eternity. Will you stir hand nor foot to save yourself, to break your fall ? not raise your voice, for once to speak the truth ? Even yet the truth may save !

The night of your life will this be, Manetho. Will you dream of those whose few hours of bliss will stamp Forever on the seal of your damnation ? Think,—through what interminable æons the weight of their just curse will pile itself higher and heavier on your miserable soul ! Fain would you doubt the truth of immortality : but the power of unbelief is gone ; devil-like, you believe and tremble. And where is the reward which should recompense

you for this large outlay? Does the honey of your long-awaited triumph offend your lips like gall?—Then woe for him whose morning dreams of vengeance become realities in the evening!

How stands it between you and Gnulemah, Manetho? She has never loved you ardently, perhaps; but how will you face her hatred? It is late to be asking such questions,—but has not her temperate affection been your most precious possession? have you not yearned and laboured for it? have you not loved her with more than a father's tenderness? Under mask of planning her ruin, have not all the softer and better impulses of your nature found exercise and sustenance? Conceiving a devil, have you brought forth an angel, and unawares tasted angelic joy?—If this be true, Manetho, your guilty purpose towards her is not excused, but how much more awful becomes the contemplation of her fate! Rouse up! sluggard, rush

forth ! you may save her yet. Up ! would you risk the salvation of three souls to glut a meaningless spite ? You have been fighting shadows with a shadow. Up !—it is the last appeal.—

You stir,—get stiffly to your feet,—put hand to forehead,—stare around. The twilight has deepened apace ; only by glancing upwards can you distinguish a definite light. You are uncertain and lethargic in your movements, as though the dawning in you of a worthy resolution had impaired the evil principle of your vitality. You are as a man fed on poison, who suddenly tastes an antidote,—and finds it fatal !

You halt towards the door and put forth a hand to open it. You will save Gnulemah ; her innocence will save her from the sense of loss. As for Balder,—his suffering will satisfy a reasonable enemy. No wife, no fortune, the cup dashed from his lips just as the aroma was ravishing his nostrils !—Oh, enough ! Open the door, therefore, and go forth.

In your magnanimity you feel for the key, but it is not in its accustomed place. Try your pockets : still in vain ! Startled you turn to the table, and feel carefully over it from end to end. You raise the heavy chair like a feather, and shake it bottom downwards. Nothing falls. You are down on your knees groping affrighted amongst the dust and rubbish of the floor.—The key is lost ! You spring up—briskly enough now—and stand with your long fingers working against one another, trying to think. That key—where had you it last ?—

A blank whirl is your memory,—nothing stands clearly out. How came you here ? With whom did you speak just now ? What was said ?—Two persons there seemed to be, oddly combined in one,—most unfamiliar in their familiarity. Or was it your evil genius, Manetho ? who by devilish artifice has at this last hour shut the door against your first good impulse : locked the door against soul and body :

shut you in, and carried off the key of your salvation.

Do not give way yet ; review your situation carefully.—Your voice would be inaudible through these massive walls, were the listener but a yard away.—Be quick with your thinking, for the unmitigable minutes are dying fast and for ever.—Were it known that you were here, could you be got out? No, for the secret of the door is known only to yourself. Those who once shared the knowledge with you are dead, or many years gone ! Your evil genius no doubt knows it, and all your secrets : but dream not that she will rescue you. She has been awaiting this opportunity. You shall remain here to-night and many nights. Your bones shall lie gaunt on this cobwebbed floor. Only the daily sunbeam shall know of your tomb. And Gnulemah ? . . .

Your knees falter beneath you, and you sink in wretched tears to the floor,—tears that bring no

drop of comfort. To be shut up alone with a soul like yours, at the moment when the sin so long tampered with has escaped your control, and is pitilessly doing its devilish work on the other side your prison-walls, near, yet inaccessible,—who can measure the horror of it? Till now you have made your will the law of right and wrong, and read your life by no higher light than your own. You read it otherwise to-night, lying here alone and helpless. That lost key has unlocked the fair front of your complacency and revealed the wizened deformity behind it. You have been insane; but the anguish that would craze a sane man, clears the mist from your reason. You behold the truth at last: but as the drowning man sees the ship pass on and leave him.—

But we care not to watch too curiously the writhings of your imprisoned soul, Manetho: the less, because we doubt whether the agony will be of benefit to you. Forgiveness of

enemies is perhaps beyond your scope: even your rage to save Gnulemah was kindled chiefly by your impotence to do so. God forbid we do you less than justice! but hope seems dim for such as you; nor will a death-bed repentance,—however sincere,—avail to wipe away the sins of a lifetime. Jealousy of Balder, rather than desire for Gnulemah's eternal weal, awoke your conscience. For the thought of their spending life in happy ignorance of their true relationship, inflames,—does not allay—your agony!

Your womanish outburst of despairing tears over, a hot fever of restlessness besets you. The space is narrow for disquiet such as yours,—you hunt to and fro the strip of floor like a caged beast. No way out—no way out!

Face to face with lingering death, why not hasten it? No moral scruple withholds you. Yet will you not die by your own hand. Through all your suffering you will cling to life and worship it. Never will you open your

arms to death,—which seems to you no grave, compassionate angel, but a malignant fiend lying in ambush for your soul. And such a fiend will your death be ; for to all men, death is the reflection of their life in the mind's mirror. Still to and fro you fare, a flitting shadow through a narrow gloom, walled in with stone.

Awful is this unnatural sanity of intellect: it is like the calm in the whirlwind's centre, where the waves run higher though the air is deadly still, and the surly mariner wishes the mad wind back again.—To and fro, to and fro, an uneasy ghost, goaded on and strengthened by untiring anguish. You are but the ghost of a man, your thought and emotion are abroad, haunting the unconscious, happy lovers!—

Suddenly you stop short in your blind walk, throw up your arms, and break into an irrepressible chuckle. Has your brain given way at last?—No, your laugh is the outcome of a genuine revulsion of feeling, intense but legitimate. What is the cause of it?—You plunge

into the rubbish-heap at one end of the room, and grasp and draw forth the rickety old ladder which has been lying there these twenty years. You have seen it almost daily, poking out amidst the cobwebs, and probably for that very reason have so long failed to perceive that it was susceptible of a better use than to be food for worms. You set it upright against the wall, its top-round falls three feet below the horizontal aperture. Enough, if you tread with care. Narrow, steep and rickety is the path to deliverance : but up ! for your time is short.

Upward, with cautious eagerness ! The ladder is warped and rests unevenly, and once or twice a round cracks beneath the down-pressing foot, the thing is all unsound and might fall to pieces at any moment. However, the top is gained, and your nervous hands are on the sill at last. Raising yourself a little higher, you look forth on the world once more.

Not so late after all ! Red still lingers along

the western horizon, but against it is mounting and expanding a black cloud, glancing ever and anon with dangerous lightning. In a clear sky-lake above the cloud, steadily burns a planet. The gentle twilight rests lovingly on earth's warm bosom—

Hark! look! what moves yonder beneath the trees?—

Your parched eager face strained forwards, your hungry eyes eating through the gloom,—see emerge from the avenue two figures, sauntering lover-like side to side! How forgetful of the world they seem! Little think they of you,—of the rack on which you have been outstretched. But their hour has come. This moment shall be their last of peace,—their last of happy love.

—What sound was that?—Was it a yell of triumph,—a shout for help,—a scream of terror?—It does not come again: but the silence is more terrible than the cry.

XXXIII.

THE BLACK CLOUD.

“HIERO,—it was his voice!” said Gnulemah.

She looked in her lover’s face, trusting to his wisdom and strength. She rested her courage on his, but her eyes stirred him like a trumpet-call. The burden of that cry had been calamity. Love is protean—makes but a step from dalliance to grandeur. Balder, no longer a sentimental bridegroom, stood forth ready, brief, energetic,—but more a lover than before!

The voice had at the first moment sounded startlingly clear; then it had seemed distant and muffled. As Helwyse swiftly skirted the granite wall of the temple, his mind was busy with conjecture; but he failed to hit upon any reasonable explanation. The cry had come from the direction of the temple, and had he known of the ex-

istence of the apertures through the masonry, he might partly have solved the mystery. As it was, he thought only of getting inside, feeling sure that, explainably or not, Manetho must be there.

In the oaken hall he met Nurse, who had also heard the cry, but knew not whence it proceeded.

"In the temple, I think," said Helwyse, answering her agitated gesture.

The clue was sufficient: she sped along towards the door whence she had so lately fled panic-stricken, Helwyse following. Beneath the solemn excitement and perplexity, lay warm and secure in his heart the thought of Gnulemah,—his wife. Blessed thought! which the whips and scorns of time should make but more tenderly dear and precious.

As he breathed the incense-laden air of the temple, Balder's face grew stern. At each step he thought to see death in some ghastly form.

In the joy of this his marriage night he had wished all the world might have rejoiced with him : but already was calamity abroad. Birth and death, love and hate, happiness and woe, are borne on every human breath, and mingle with daily meat and drink. So be it!—They were parodies of humanity who should live on a purer diet or inhale a rarer atmosphere.

All the lights in the great hall, except the altar-lamp, were burnt out, and the place was very dusky. Nurse went straight towards the secret door, looking neither to the right nor left; while Helwyse, who did not suspect its existence, was prying into each dark nook and corner. An inarticulate exclamation from the woman arrested him. She was standing behind the altar, close to the clock. As he approached she pointed to the wall. She had found the key in the lock, but dared not be first to brave the sight of what might be within. She appealed to the strength

of the man, yet with a morbid jealousy of his precedence.

Helwyse saw the key, and turning it, the seeming-solid wall disclosed a door, opening outwards, —a single slab of massive granite. Within all was dark, and there was no sound. Was anything there?

He looked round to address Nurse, but her appearance checked him. She was staring into the darkness; he could feel her one-eyed glance pass him, fastening on something beyond. He moved to let the lamplight enter the doorway; and then, in the illuminated square that fell on the floor, he saw Manetho's upturned face. The fallen priest lay with one arm doubled under him, the other thrown across his breast. Nurse stared at her broken idol, motionless, with stertorous breathing.

But was Manetho dead? Helwyse, the physician, stepped across the threshold, and stooped to examine the body. The dumb crea-

ture followed and lay down, animal-like, close beside the deity of her worship. Presently the physician said,

“There’s life in him, but he’s hurt internally. We must find a way to move him from here.”

“Life!”—the woman heard, nor cared for more. Her dry fixedness gave way with a gasp, and she broke into hysteric tears, rocking herself backwards and forwards, crooning over the insensible body, or stooping to kiss it. She had no sense nor heed save for the lover of her youth.

“Could such a creature have been his wife? or even his mistress?” questioned Helwyse of himself. But he spoke out sharply:—

“You must stop this. He must be revived at once. Go and make ready a bed, and I will carry him to it.”

As he spoke, a silent shadow fell across the body, and Gnulemah stood in the doorway. Balder’s first impulse was to motion her away

from a spectacle so unsuited to her eyes. But though the shadow made her face inscrutable, the lines of her figure spoke—and not of weak timidity or effeminate consternation. Womanly she was—instinct with that tender sensitive power, the marvellous gift of God to woman only, which almost moves the sick man to bless his sickness. A holy gift—surely the immediate influx of Christ's spirit. Man knows it not, albeit when he and woman have become more closely united than now, he may attain to share the Divine prerogative. Study nor skill can counterfeit it; but in the true woman it is perfect at the first appeal as at the last.

“He shall have my bed,” said this young goddess Isis, “it is ready, and my lamp is burning.”

Balder stooped to uplift his insensible burden.

“Oh, not so!—more tenderly than that,” she interposed softly. A moment's hesitation, and then she unfastened the golden shoulder-clasp,

and shook off her ample mantle. , This was Manetho's litter.

“ I will help you carry him.—Why do you weep, Nurse ? he will awake, or Balder would have told us.”

Never, since Diana stooped to earth to love Endymion, was seen a nobler sight than Gnulemah in her simple, clinging tunic, whose heavy golden hem kissed her polished knee, while her round and clear-cut arms were left bare. After the first glance, her lover lowered his eyes, lest he should forget all else in gazing at her. But the blood mounted silently to his cheeks and burned there. As for her,—she trusted Balder more freely than herself.

Manetho was laid gently on the broad robe, and so upraised and borne forwards,—Balder at the head, Gnulemah at the foot. Heavy,—heavy is a lifeless body ; but the man had cause to wonder at the woman's fresh and easy strength. What a contrast was she to the disfigured

creature who hobbled moaning beside the litter, the relaxed hand clutched in both hers, kissing it again and again with grotesque passion! Yet both were women, and loved as women love.

The granite statues sitting serene at the doorway, maintained the stony calm which, only, deserves the name of supernatural. These passed, the flowery heat of the dim conservatory brought them to Gnulemah's room. The curtain was looped up, and the passage clear. Thus first did the wedded pair enter what should have been their bridal-chamber, and laid the lifeless body on the nuptial bed.

A fair, pure room: the clear walls frescoed with graceful wreaths of floating figures. In the eastern window, through which the earliest sunbeams loved to fall, stood an alabaster altar; on it a chain of faded dandelions. The bed was a lovely nest, the lines flowing in long curves,—a barge of Venus for lovers to voyage to heaven

in. On a table near at hand lay some embroidered work at which Gnulemah's magic needle had been busy of late. Balder glanced at these things with a reverence almost timid : and turning back to what lay so inert and doltish on the sacred bed, he could not but sigh.

Every means was employed to rally the Egyptian from his swoon. He bore no external marks of injury, but there could be no doubt that he had sustained a terrible shock, and possibly concussion of the brain ; the amount of the internal damages could not yet be estimated. —Meanwhile the black cloud from the west was muttering drowsily overhead, and an occasional lightning-flash dulled the mild radiance of the lamp. As consciousness ebbed back to the patient, the storm increased, and the trembling roll of heavy thunder drowned the first gasps of returning life. Had that vast cloud come to shut out his soul from heaven, and was its

mighty voice uttering the sentence of his condemnation?—The air was thick with the inconsolable weeping of the rain, and gusty sighs of wind drove its cold tear-drops against the window.

How was it with Manetho?—During the instant after the ladder had given way and he was rushing through the air and clutching vainly at the dark void, every faculty had violently expanded, so that he seemed to see and think at every pore. The next instant his rudely battered body refused to bear the soul's messages; light and knowledge sank into bottomless darkness.

By-and-by—for aught he knew it might have been an eternity—a brief gleam divided the night: then another, and others: he seemed to be moving through air, upborne on a cloud. He strove to open his eyes, and caught a glimpse of reeling walls,—of a figure—figures. A deep rumbling sound was in his ears, as of

the rolling together of chaotic rocks, gradually subsiding into stillness.

He felt no pain,—only dreamy ease. He was resting softly on a bank of flowers, in the heart of a summer's day. He was filled with peace and love, and peace and love were around him.. Some one was nestling beside him ; was it not the woman—the bright-eyed, smiling gipsey with whom he had plighted troth ?—surely it was she.

“Salome,—Salome, are you here ? Touch me—lay your cheek by mine. So—give me your hand. I love you, my pretty pet,—your Manetho loves you !”

The slow sentences ended. Nurse had laid her unsightly head beside his on the pillow, and the two were happy in each other. O piteous, revolting, solemn sight ! Those faces, grief-smitten, old : long ago, in passionate and lawless youth, they had perchance lain thus and murmured loving words. And now for a

moment they met and loved again,—while death knocked at their chamber door !

But Balder had perceived a startling significance in Manetho's words. He took Gnulemah by the hand and led her to the eastern window. A flash greeted them, creating a momentary world, which started from the womb of night, and vanished again before one could say "It is there !" Then followed a long-drawn, intermittent rumble, as if the fragments of the spectre world were tumbling avalanche-wise into chaos.

"I remember now about the dandelions," Balder said. "Was not Nurse with us then ?"

"Yes," answered Gnulemah; "and it was she and Hiero who took me from you. But why does he call her Salome ? and who is Manetho ?"

Balder did not reply. He leant against the window-frame and gazed out into the black storm. Knowing what he now did, it required no great stretch of ingenuity to unravel Mane-

tho's secret.—He turned to Gnulemah, and taking her in his arms, kissed her with a defiant kind of ardour.

“What is it?” she whispered, clinging to him with a reflex of his own unspoken emotion.

“We are safe!—But that man shall not die without hearing the truth,” he added, sternly.

Again there was a dazzling lightning-flash, and the thunder seemed to break at their very ears. By a quick sinuous movement, Gnulemah freed herself from his arm and looked at him with her grand eyes—night black, lit each with a sparkling star. Her feminine intuition perceived a change in him, though she could not fathom its cause. It jarred the fineness of their mutual harmony.

“Our happiness should make others' greater,” said she.

He looked into her eyes with a gaze so ardent that their lids drooped: and the tone of his answer, though lover-like, had more of mascu-

line authority in it than she had yet heard from him.

“My darling, you do not know what wrong he has done you—and others. It is only justice that he should learn how God punishes such as he!”

“Will not God teach him?” said Gnulemah, trembling to oppose the man she loved, yet by love compelled to do so.

Balder paused, and looked towards the bed. There was a flickering smile on Manetho's face; he seemed to be reviving. His injuries were perhaps not fatal after all. Should he recover, he must sooner or later suffer his so-called punishment; meanwhile, Balder was inclined to regard himself as the chosen minister of Divine justice. Why not speak now?

This was the second occasion that he had held Manetho in his power, at a time when the Egyptian had been attempting his destruction. In the previous encounter he had retaliated in kind.

Would the bitter issue of that self-indulgence not make him wary now? Here was again the murderous lust of power, albeit disguised as love of justice. Had Balder's penitent suffering failed to teach him the truth of human brotherhood, and equality before God? Love, typified by Gnulemah, would fain dissuade him from his purpose: but love (as often happens when it stands in the way of harsh and ignoble impulses) appeared foolishly merciful.

Once again his glance met Gnulemah's,—lingered a moment,—and then turned away. It was for the last time. At that moment he was less noble than ever before. But the expression of her eyes he never forgot; the love, the entreaty, the grandeur,—the sorrow!—

He turned away and approached the bedside, while Gnulemah went to kneel at her maiden altar. Manetho's eyes were closed; his features wore a singularly child-like expression. In truth, he was but half himself; the shock he had

sustained had paralysed one part of his nature. The subtle, evil-plotting Egyptian was dormant: his brain interpreted nothing save the messages of the heart: only the affectionate, emotional Manetho was awake. The evil he had done, and the misery of it were forgotten.—All this Balder divined; yet his assumption of godlike censorship would not permit him to relent. It is when man deems himself most secure, that he falls, in a worse way than ever.

“Do you know me,” Manetho? demanded the young man.

The priest opened his eyes dreamily, and smiled; but made no further answer.

“I am Balder Helwyse—the son of Thor,” continued the other, speaking with incisive deliberation, the better to touch the stunned man’s apprehension. “I once had a twin sister. You believe Gnulemah to be she.”

The priest’s features were getting a bewildered, plaintive expression. Either he was

beginning to comprehend the purport of Balder's words, or else the sternness of the latter's tone and glance agitated him.

Balder concentrated all his force into the utterance of the final sentences, vowing to himself that his fallen enemy should understand! Did he think of Gnulemah, then? or of Salome—partly for whose sake, as he feigned, he had assumed the scourge?

"My sister died—was burned to death before she was a year old. In trying to save her, the nurse almost lost her own life. On that same night, this nurse gave birth to a daughter—whose name you have called Gnulemah. Salome is her mother. Who her father is, Manetho, you best know!"

The words were spoken—but had the culprit heard them? Salome (who from the first had shrunk back to the head of the bed, beyond the possible range of Manetho's vision,) burst into confused hysteric cries. Gnulemah had risen

from her altar and was looking at Balder: he felt her glance,—but though he told himself that he had done but justice, he dared not meet it!—He kept his eyes fastened on the pallid countenance of the Egyptian. The latter's breath came feebly and irregularly, but the anxious expression was gone, and there was again the flickering smile. All at once there was an odd, solemn change.—

The man was dying. Balder saw it—saw that his enemy was escaping him unpunished! There yet remained one stimulant that might rouse him, and in the passion of the moment, this self-appointed lieutenant of the Almighty applied it.

“Come forward here, Salome!” cried he: “let him look on the face that his sins have given you. As there is a God in Heaven, your wrongs shall be set right!”

Salome moved to obey: but Gnulemah glided swiftly up and held her back. Balder stepped

imperiously forward to enforce his will. Had he but answered his wife's eyes even then!—He came forward one step.

Then burst a thunder-clap like the crashing together of heaven and earth! At the same instant a blinding, hot glare shut out all sight. Balder was hurled back against the wall, a shock like the touch of death in every nerve.

He staggered up, all unstrung, his teeth chattering. He saw—not the lamp, flickering in the draught from the broken window;—not Manetho, lying motionless with the smile frozen on his lips;—not Salome, prostrate across the body of him she had worshipped.

He saw Gnulemah—his wife whom he loved—rise from the altar's step against which she had been thrown: stand with outstretched arms and blank, wide-open eyes; grope forwards with outstretched arms and uncertain feet; grope blindly this way and that, moaning,—

“Balder—Balder—where are you?”

Shivering and desperate,—not yet daring for his life to understand,—he came and stood before her, almost within reach of those groping hands.

“I am here—look at me, Gnulemah!—I am here—your husband!”

There was a pause. The storm, spent in that last burst, was rolling heavily away. There was silence in the nuptial chamber, infringed only by the breathing of the newly-married lovers.

“I hear you, Balder,” said Gnulemah at length, tremulously, while her blank eyes rested on his face, “but I cannot see you. My lamp must have gone out. Will not you light it for me?”—

Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord: I will repay!

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The storm-cloud moved eastward and was dispersed. Black though had been its shadow,

it endured but for a moment ; the echo of its fury passed away, and its deadly thunderbolt left behind a purer atmosphere. So sweeps and rages over men's heads the storm of calamity ; and so dissolves, though seeming for the time indissoluble.

But the distant planet comes forth serene from its brief eclipse, and as night deepens, bears its steady fire yet more aloft. Like God's love, its radiance embraces the world, yet forgets not the smallest flower nor grain of sand. From its high station it beholds the infinite day surround the night, and knows the good before and beyond the ill. Great is its hope, for causes are not hidden from its quiet eternal eye.

No journal of a life has been our tale ; rather a glimpse of a beginning ! We have traversed an alpine pass, between the illimitable lands of Past and Future. We have felt the rock rugged beneath our feet ; have seen the

avalanche and mused beside the precipice, and have taken what relief we might in the scanty greensward, the few flowers and the brief sunshine. Now, standing on the farewell promontory, let us question the magic mirror concerning the further road,—as, before, of that from the backward horizon hitherwards.

Mr MacGentle's quiet little office : himself—more venerable by a year than when we saw him last—in his chair : opposite him, Dr. Balder Helwyse. The latter wears a thick yellow beard about six inches in length, is subdued in dress and manner, and his smile, though genial, has something of the sadness of autumn sunshine. The two have been conversing earnestly, and now there is a short silence.

“ We must give up hoping it, then,” says Mr MacGentle at last, in a more than usually plaintive murmur. “ It is hard—very hard, dear Balder.”

“ Now that I know there is no hope,

I can acknowledge the good even while I feel the hardship. Her dreams have been of a world such as no real existence could show : to have been awakened would permanently have saddened her, if no worse. But she is great enough to believe without seeing : and in the deepest sense, her belief is true. She still remains in that ideal fairy-land in which I found her ; and no doubt, as time goes on, her visions grow more beautiful ! ”

Thus Balder Helwyse, in tones agreeably vigorous, though grave and low.

“ Yes—yes ; and perhaps, dear Balder, the denial of this one great boon may save her from much indefinite disquiet ; and certainly, as you say, from the great danger of disappointment and its consequences. Yes,—and you may still keep her lamp alight, with a more lasting than Promethean fire !—But how is it with you, dear boy ? ”

“ Let none who love me pray for my tem-

poral prosperity," returns Helwyse, turning his strong dark gaze on the other's aged eyes. "I have met with many worshippers of false gods, but none, the germs of whose sin I found not in myself. The *I* to whom was confided this excellent instrument of faculties and senses, is a poor, weak, selfish creature, who fancied his gifts argued the possession of the very merits whose lack they prove. God, in His infinite mercy, deals sternly with me : and I know how to thank Him !"—

Mr MacGentle does not reply in words : but a grave smile glimmers in his faded eyes, and, smiling, he slowly shakes his venerable head.

One more brief glimpse, and then we are done.—

A pleasant parlour of southern aspect, looking through a deep bay-window over a spacious garden. Here sits a stalwart gentleman of middle age, with a little boy and girl on either knee, who play bo-peep with his wide-spreading

yellow beard. How they all laugh ! and what a pleasant laugh 'has the stalwart, dark-eyed gentleman,—so deep-toned and yet so boyish ! But presently all three pause to take breath.

“ Thor,” then says the gentleman, “ whose portrait did I tell you that was ? ” and he points to an oil-painting hanging over the piano.

“ Grandpapa MacGentle, papa ! ”

“ What did he do for all of us ? ”

As Master Thor hesitates a moment, the little golden-haired lady breaks in ;—“ *I* know, papa ! He made uth rich, and gave uth our houthie, and he thaw me when I wath a wee, wee baby, and then he—he ”—

“ He went to Heaven, papa ! ” says Thor, recovering himself.

Hereupon there was a silence, because the two children, glancing up in their father's face, saw that it was grave and thoughtful.

But suddenly the little girl pricks up her small ears, and scrambles to the carpet, and sets off

for the door at full speed, without a word. Thor is close behind, but just too late to be first in opening the door.

“Mamma ! mamma !”

And Balder Helwyse springs up, and as she enters with the rejoicing children at each hand, he meets her with the thrilling smile which, in this world, she will never see !

THE END.

